Chapter 1

General Introduction

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Critical incidents are a reality facing everybody. South Africans are faced with incidents such as hijacking, armed robbery, rape, murder, suicide, housebreaking, divorce, death and other violent acts on a daily basis. Meichenbaum (1994:231) includes critical incidents such as rape, shooting incidents, car accidents or earth quakes as Type 1 traumas. A Type 1 trauma has the following characteristics: it is a single dangerous, overwhelming event, it is sudden and surprising, it has limited duration, it can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and quick recovery is unlikely. The researcher is interested in the effect of critical incidents with Type 1 characteristics because of the general perception that there is a higher occurrence of these incidents in the South African society and to establish the effect of such incidents on the work performance of employees.

Crime statistics in South Africa indicates that "Recorded crime increased by 15% between 1994 and 1999, with an average year-on-year increase of 3% during this time" (Altbeker, 2002:7). According to Altbeker (2001:10), 217 out of every 100 000 people in Johannesburg and 148 out of every 100 000 people in Pretoria were raped during 1999. The number of assaults per 100 000 people were even higher and posed at 923 people in Johannesburg and590 in Pretoria. Car hijacking increased by 29% on a year-on-year basis, between 1994 and 1999. Murder increased by 2% and rape by 4% year-on-year between 1994 and 1999 in Gauteng. Although these figures are staggering, it seems that there is an improvement: "National and Provincial police crime figures indicate that crime to a certain extent, levelled off in the course of 2002. Murder continues to decline, as does vehicle theft. However, the trends for car hi-jacking are less positive" (Leggett, 2003:17). These statistics indicate that many people are directly or indirectly affected either as the victim or as family members, friends or colleagues of the victim.

According to Strydom (2002a:211), the prospective researcher can only hope to undertake meaningful research if he/she is fully up to date with existing knowledge on his/her prospective subject. A literature study is not only important for the clear formulation of the problem, but also for executing the planning and actual implementation of the investigation.

This researcher used different sources such as books, journals, dissertations, theses and other documents to obtain the most recent information on the subject. The literature study focused on the following areas: critical incident, stress debriefing, crisis intervention, PTSD, work performance, psychosocial functioning and employee assistance programmes. For the purposes of the study, a short overview on critical incidents according to the literature is provided.

A critical incident refers to "an event that is extraordinary and produces significant reactions for the intervening person. It may be so unusual that it overwhelms the natural abilities of people that have to cope with difficult situations" (Lewis, 1996:15). A critical incident may lead to stress, burnout, or even PTSD that may be experienced almost immediately or may be delayed for days, weeks or months. According to Lewis (1996:18), a critical incident can lead to a range of physical, cognitive and emotional reactions. Physical reactions include fatigue, dizziness, nausea, and sleep and appetite disturbances. Cognitive reactions may include mental confusion, memory impairment, difficulty with decision making and intrusive thoughts. Emotional reactions may include fear, anxiety, depression, grief and irritability. These reactions have a significant impact on the work life and work performance of the victim and may even have an impact on the work life and work performance of people close to the victim.

According to Strydom (2002a:212), the wealth of knowledge in literature is only a section of the knowledge of the people in the specified field. It can be extremely valuable to consult these sources specifically for their experience. Strydom (2002a:213) further mentions that the researcher "should ensure that he approaches a representative number of experts whose experience and opinions can be utilized."

For the purpose of this study the researcher consulted the following experts to gain insight and knowledge for the proposed study:

- **Dr André van Jaarsveld – Director Group Affairs (The Careways Group) until March 2008**
  In a personal interview with Dr van Jaarsveld, he indicated that the mission of The Careways Group is to provide integrated and comprehensive health support solutions to at risk populations within organisations, thereby contributing to the business effectiveness

of these organisations and improving the quality of life of the people working for them (A van Jaarsveld, personal communication, March, 2004).

People exposed to and traumatised by a critical incident are at risk and their work performance and psychosocial functioning are affected. According to Lewis (1996:77), when a stressor becomes extremely threatening, overwhelming, or severe, it often produces a heightened state of cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioural arousal called traumatic stress. After having been exposed to traumatic stress, employees may experience a range of reactions including deterioration of job performance, personality change, anxiety states, relational problems, grief reaction, depression and suicidal ideation. It is, however, difficult to establish to what degree and for what period the work performance and psychosocial functioning of the employee will be affected.

Organisations are usually profit driven and if an employee's work performance is poor, it affects the organisation financially. The National Work Performance Institute indicates that during the first three months after a traumatic incident, a 25 to 45% decrease in work performance is noticeable in the work performance of a traumatised employee (National Work Performance Institute, in Retief, 2004:66). Organisations are not always aware of the impact that a critical incident may have on the work performance and the psychosocial functioning of an employee. Owing to this limited understanding of the impact of a critical incident, the employee does not get the appropriate care and support to recover fully in the shortest period of time. If organisations are aware of the effects of a critical incident in the workplace and understand the importance of effective intervention to improve work performance and psychosocial functioning, they will be more willing to purchase and support a programme that can improve the quality of life of their employees and ultimately improve their work performance. By offering these services to employees, the organisation gains in terms of increased work performance and business effectiveness.

- **Rev Barbara Louw – Managing Director, Inter Trauma Nexus**
  Rev Louw is an expert in the field of trauma debriefing. She focuses on individual and group trauma debriefings. Rev Louw (personal communication, March, 2004) is of the opinion that a critical incident is a single incident that not necessarily leads to traumatisation. A trauma is more severe and has a longer-term effect on the victim. A

person can be the primary victim of a trauma (indicating that the person was directly traumatised) or secondary victim (not directly traumatised) who witnessed the trauma or is closely related to the victim. The history of a victim in terms of previous traumas is important. Friedman (2003:21) refers to pre-trauma risk factors which may determine to what extent a person is traumatised by a specific critical incident. These risk factors include adverse life events, for example divorce, loss of a job and financial problems, previous exposure to traumas as a child or as an adult, health problems and a history of psychiatric problems. If a person has been exposed to critical incidents or traumas previously, it may have an effect on the way a person reacts to the most recent trauma. This refers to accumulated trauma, which determines a person's stress response, and ultimately how the person's work performance, psychosocial functioning and work performance are affected. Owing to the fact that the effects of traumas accumulate, the possibility for the development of PTSD increases.

Rev Louw (2004) is of the opinion that a trauma is not determined by the severity of the incident, but rather by the individual's reaction to the incident. Friedman (2003:27) tends to disagree and states that "the higher the severity (dose) of trauma the greater the magnitude of trauma exposure, the greater the likelihood of being traumatized". A critical incident includes incidents such as divorce, retirement, the migration of children and other events that are experienced as traumatic by the victim.

- **Ms Anine van Zyl – Employee Assistance Professional/Psychologist at the University of Pretoria**
  As employee assistance professional working with personnel at the University of Pretoria, Ms van Zyl (personal communication, March 2004) is confronted with traumatised employees regularly. She defines both a critical incident and a trauma as an unexpected event that poses an immediate threat to a person's well-being and mobilises coping mechanisms immediately. The difference between a critical incident and a traumatic event is that the traumatic event poses the risk of significant loss in terms of safety, self-belief, life-stage, person, expectations or freedom. Critical incidents have short-term effects. Trauma on the other hand has longer-term effects, because of the risk of significant loss. Trauma is determined by the individual's reaction to an event and not by the event itself.

Herman (1992:33) defines psychological trauma as "an affliction of the powerless, where the victim is (at the moment of trauma) rendered helpless by overwhelming force". She differentiates between the force of nature (a disaster) and the force of another human being (an atrocity). These events have the effect of threatening a person's life and/or physical integrity, rendering him/her helpless, terrorised, disconnected and at a loss. In the process the person's ordinary adaptations to life are overwhelmed and the response to catastrophe is evoked.

When working with a traumatised person, the therapist must help the victim to neutralise the event, educate the victim on possible reactions, link the trauma to previous traumas and determine the level of risk the individual is exposed to.

Working with employees, Ms van Zyl (2004) witnessed the ripple effect a traumatic event can have in the workplace. Colleagues and family close to the traumatised person may also be traumatised and experience symptoms of trauma. Traumatisation has an impact on the physical, mental and emotional well-being of a person. Trauma leaves the employee vulnerable and has an effect on the employee's concentration, relationships and ability to work. It often leaves the employee with existential issues and questions about the meaning of life. As a therapist she often uses cognitive restructuring as a method to assist the employee to return to a positive state of mind and to prevent long-term depression.

- **Mr Arthur Neil – Deputy Director, National Defence Force/Psychologist**
  Mr Neil (personal communication, March, 2004) is a psychologist in the National Defence Force and is responsible for the debriefing of employees exposed to traumas in the workplace. He views a critical incident as a threat to a person's well-being when it poses heightened expectations to the person's coping mechanisms. A traumatic experience always indicates the possibility of significant loss in terms of life, safety and freedom.

  He makes use of brief therapy as a model for trauma debriefing and experiences it as being very effective in a person's recovery and long-term functioning. Mr Neil stresses the fact that the traumatised person is very receptive to intervention within two to 24 hours after the incident. Plaggermars (2000:80) agrees and embraces the central principle of the crisis theory, which states that during a crisis: a) people may need additional coping

skills to deal with a traumatic experience; and b) people are unusually open to acquiring new skills. Weeks or months after the incident the person may not see the need for intervention because the person has learned to cope with the trauma. This, however, does not imply that the person is functioning as he/she should and that his/her issues are resolved. A person who did not receive any debriefing after a trauma may react more severely with the next trauma due to the effect of accumulated trauma.

After the war on South Africa's borders, soldiers traumatised by land mines, crossfire and hostage dramas consulted Mr Neil. Some of these soldiers were never debriefed after the incident and became his patient's years after the events because of depression, poor psychosocial functioning, poor work performance, dysfunctional relationships, a tendency to substance abuse and suicidal risk.

Research in the USA, according to Friedman (2003:12), indicates that 60,7% of men and 51,2% of women would be exposed, at least once during their lives, to a catastrophic incident. In South Africa we may infer that the exposure figure in all probability is much higher as a result of the high crime rate, violence and history of political instability.

Mr Neil (2004) stresses the importance of timely intervention to prevent long-term depression, poor work performance and dysfunctional relationships.

- **Mr Craig Higson-Smith – Director of the South African Institute for Traumatic Stress**
  A critical incident, according to Mr Higson-Smith (personal communication, March, 2004), is an event that affects a person's physical safety and results in feelings of fear and helplessness. A trauma is more severe and indicates the threat of significant loss in terms of life, safety, self-belief and freedom. He describes a trauma as an external event, leading to an internal response. He uses different models of intervention for different traumas. Brief therapy has proven to be effective in traumas such as bank robberies or car hijackings because of victims' high receptiveness for intervention and openness to acquire new skills after a crisis (Plaggermars, 2000:80) Long-term therapy (e.g. narrative approach) is effective when working with survivors of sexual abuse. Trauma has a severe effect on a person's psychosocial functioning and work performance and is noticeable in a person's poor concentration, absenteeism, tiredness and irritability. Persons who have received trauma debriefing usually make a full recovery and the risk for developing PTSD

is minimised. On the other hand, people who have not received debriefing are likely to develop post-traumatic symptoms and PTSD at a later stage, according to Mr Higson-Smith.

- **Mrs Yvonne Retief – Trauma counsellor and author of the book *Genesing vir trauma* (translated as: *Healing from trauma*)**

  Mrs Retief (personal communication, March, 2004) is a counsellor who specialises in working with survivors of sexual abuse. She also does trauma debriefing for persons who were hi-jacked, were in bank robberies and car accidents, got divorced and retired. She is of the opinion that any life event can potentially be traumatic. "'n Persoon het 'n trauma beleef indien hy/sy blootgestel was aan gebeure wat te make het met óf sy/haar lewensomstandighede, óf gebeure met sy/haar lewensfase (byvoorbeeld die oorgaan van een lewensfase na die ander of omstandighede as gevolg van 'n nuwe lewensfase wat die person onhanteerbaar vind) en wat tot gevolg het dat daardie persoon se gewone hanterings meganismes lam gelê word" (Retief, 2004:18). "A person suffered a trauma when he/she had been exposed to events that had to do with his or her life circumstances, or events that had to do with his/her phase of life (e.g. moving from one life phase to another or circumstances as a result of a new life phase that the person could not handle) with the result that this person's usual handling mechanisms were paralysed" (Retief, 2004:18) [translated by researcher]. The individual's reaction to the event will determine if it is a traumatic event for that person. Mrs Retief uses traumatic incident reduction (TIR) as model of intervention when debriefing traumatic events with short- and long-term effects. TIR intends to move the client from the chronic stage of victimisation to the previous stage where the client was functioning well. TIR leads to spontaneous client-generated insight, personal growth and empowerment. The model has proven to be successful in long- and short-term therapy, moving clients to the previous level of normal functioning and restoring psychosocial functioning and work performance.

The motivation for this research was to determine how employees' psychosocial functioning and work performance were affected as a direct result of a critical incident. The researcher was further interested to determine if the employee made use of the employee assistance programme, if the level of intervention was appropriate and if the intervention helped in the recovery process. The purpose of appropriate and early intervention is to lessen the effect of the incident on the victim. The researcher is of the opinion that early intervention can prevent

post-traumatic stress symptoms and the development of PTSD. The aim of critical incident debriefing is to minimise the after-effects of trauma and to reduce the likelihood of people involved developing the symptoms of PTSD (Smith, 2001:330). If a victim receives the appropriate counselling after the incident and severe effects are minimised, it can lessen the effect of the incident on the work performance of the victim dramatically. Through this research the researcher hoped to establish whether the intervention after a critical incident was helpful to the victim and if it contributed to the recovery of the work performance of the employee. By establishing how employees are affected by critical incidents and the effectiveness of interventions, existing procedures and protocols can be revised and adapted to improve the work performance of employees and the work performance of the company.

In this chapter, an exposition of the planning, the structure and the strategy of the study are formulated. The motivation for the study, the research problem, the purpose of the study and the research hypothesis are discussed. The research approach, the type of research, the research design and the research procedures also receive attention in this chapter. The pilot study, the description of the research population, ethical aspects and the defining of key concepts are discussed.

1.2   PROBLEM FORMULATION

As a social worker in private practice and an affiliate employee assistance professional for The Careways Group[1], the researcher became increasingly aware of the referrals that were trauma related. In the light of the high crime statistics in South Africa, employees become victims of critical incidents such as hijacking, rape, murder, housebreaking and assault on a daily basis.

The researcher is, however, of the opinion that it is not only crime and violent acts that pose a crisis to an employee. Incidents such as divorce, death of a loved one, suicide, alcohol or drug abuse of a family member and retrenchment can also be critical to an employee.

In defining critical incidents some authors focus on the actual event as being life threatening to the individual. Bohl (1991:27) describes a critical incident as "an incident in which human

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[1]The Careways Group is an independent company specialising in employee wellness and delivering employee assistance services to a wide range of employees of different companies.

lives are lost and/or serious injuries are witnessed". Van der Kolk (1991:16) defines critical incidents as "sudden terrifying experiences that explode one's sense of predictability in life". Authors such as Mitchell highlight the individual's reaction to the actual event when defining a critical incident. Mitchell (1986:51) views a critical incident as "any significant emotional event that has the power, because of its own nature and because of the circumstances in which it occurs, to cause unusual psychological distress in healthy normal people". According to Solomon (1986:30), any situation in which a person feels overwhelmed by a sense of vulnerability and/or lack of control over the situation can be defined as a critical incident.

The researcher agrees that when defining a critical incident the focus should be on the reaction of the individual. Different incidents can trigger different reactions from different people. An individual reacts to situations differently from others. It is, however, the reaction that defines if it poses a crisis to the individual or not. A critical incident is determined by the person's reaction and how it affects his/her psychosocial functioning and work performance. A critical incident affects every part of a person's being – his/her thoughts, emotions, behaviour and physical reactions. The effects of a traumatic event only become visible in the workplace when the severity of the incident affects the well-being, performance, work performance and interpersonal relationships of the employee. According to Sonderup (1996:12), even though employees may not disclose that they were traumatised, certain symptoms of their distress might manifest in the workplace, including absenteeism, poor concentration, careless mistakes, hypersensitivity, conflict with co-workers, irritability, aggression, social withdrawal, depression and physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches and diarrhoea.

Quick and effective intervention in response to a critical incident can prevent the development of PTSD, which can have serious consequences for both employer and employee in terms of work performance.

The research problem can be formulated as follows:

> The impact of a critical incident on an employee and the reaction of the employee to the critical incident need to be researched in order to assess the effect of such a critical incident on the employee's psychosocial functioning and work performance, the lack of such information, results in the risk of not applying the most appropriate intervention.

1.3 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of this research study was to explore the impact of critical incidents on the employee.

Goals give a general indication of the direction of the research. Objectives are specific measurable, time limited, achievable and realistic. The achievement of objectives in a study should contribute to the achievement of the goal of the study.

The goal and objectives for this study were as follows:

1.3.1 Goal

The goal of the study is to explore the impact critical incidents have on the psychosocial functioning and work performance of the employee and to explain the appropriateness of interventions.

The goal of the study was, therefore, a combination of exploratory and explanatory research to assess the appropriateness of interventions provided.

Exploratory research

Royse (1995:28) mentions that exploratory research is conducted if information regarding a certain subject is limited. The value of exploratory research is that it produces new questions for future research. Neuman (1994:18) further explains that exploratory research may be the beginning of a new series of studies. The researcher conducts exploratory research to gather information for a second more systematic and more comprehensive study.

Exploratory research was conducted to give the researcher an idea of the critical incidents occurring and affecting the daily lives of the employee. By conducting exploratory research the researcher hoped to form an idea of the impact of critical incidents on the employees of the corporate client in order to serve as foundation for descriptive research where specific details of the situation were further described.

Descriptive research

According to Royse (1995:28), descriptive research elaborates on exploratory research. Descriptive research is usually done on a large scale and the population that is being studied

is well represented. Descriptive research gives exact information about the characteristics of the respondents being studied. Neuman (1994:19) mentions that descriptive research gives a picture of the specific details of a situation, social environment or a relationship. For the descriptive researcher, description of how something happened is more important than why something happened.

The researcher attempted to describe who was affected by the trauma or critical incident and how they were affected by the incident.

Fouché (2002a:107) distinguishes as follows between goals and objectives: "The one goal, purpose, aim is the dream, the other objective, is the steps one has to take, one by one, realistically at grass-root level, within a certain time span, in order to obtain the dream." According to Royse (1995:267), goals are not specific but give a certain direction to research. Objectives are specific, measurable and indicate when a result can be expected. Tripodi (1983:24) is of the opinion that goals are broad generalisations that reflect attitudes and values and give direction for human activity. Objectives are relatively concrete and measurable.
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1.3.2   Objectives

The achievement of the goal was dependent on the realisation of the following specific objectives:

- To provide a broad theoretical framework on critical incidents and their effect on the psychosocial functioning and work performance of the employee and the workforce of an organisation.
- To explore who are affected and how these employees are affected by critical incidents based on the records of referrals managed by the Careways Group call centre.
- To investigate and establish the time period that victims' psychosocial functioning and work performance are affected by a critical incident and whether any of them develop post-traumatic stress symptoms or PTSD.
- To investigate different interventions (e.g. telephone or face-to-face counselling) and different methods of intervention which can effectively be utilised in the intervention of critical incident victims.

- To investigate procedures and protocols in trauma debriefing for the purpose of identifying best practices in trauma debriefing and most effective intervention where clients are traumatised by a critical incident.
- To make conclusions and recommendations regarding the impact of critical incidents on the psychosocial functioning and work performance of the employee and to recommend best practices regarding effective intervention.

1.4   HYPOTHESIS/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to De Vos (1998:115–126), a research question is posed to understand the nature of real situations. A hypothesis is a statement about how things can be. Research questions are more relevant in a qualitative study and hypothesis in a quantitative study.

For the purpose of this study the researcher posed a hypothesis as well as research questions.

1.4.1   Hypothesis

If an employee is exposed to a critical incident, the critical incident will have a negative effect on the psychosocial functioning and work performance of the employee – unless such an employee receives proper effective intervention.

1.4.2   Research questions

- What is the impact of critical incidents on the psychosocial functioning and work performance of an employee exposed to a critical incident?
- What is the impact of counselling within the employee assistance programme (EAP) framework on the psychosocial functioning and work performance of such an employee?
- What is the impact of intervention on the well-being and production of the individual employee and business effectiveness of the corporate client?

1.5   RESEARCH APPROACH

In this study the researcher made use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Cresswell (1998:173–190) distinguishes different models in the combination of

qualitative and quantitative research: the two-phase model, dominant less-dominant model and the mixed methodology design model. For the purposes of this study, the dominant less-dominant model was used as a research approach. The one method (quantitative research) would be more prominent and, therefore, the dominant paradigm, alternatively qualitative research, would be a smaller component of the overall study and, therefore, less dominant.

The purpose of qualitative research is to explore a new field of research, situations, phenomena or events (Landman, 1990:50). De Vos, Fouché and Venter (2002:240) agree with Landman that qualitative research is a multi-perspective approach, which describes, interprets and develops social interaction. According to Mark (1996:61), there is no single reality when working with qualitative data. The reality is established by the interaction between the researcher and the phenomena he/she is researching. Methods of qualitative research include observation, in-depth interviews and the studying of material, for example personal documents.

Qualitative research can be challenging because the researcher works with the uniqueness of people and their situations. The researcher is of the opinion that qualitative research is concerned about the characteristics, attributes and qualities of human behaviour in their context. The methods of qualitative research imply intensive involvement and interaction with the individuals or subjects that are studied.

The purpose of quantitative research, according to Schurink (1998:243), is to objectively measure a social phenomenon, to test a hypothesis, and to predict and control human behaviour. Variables are manipulated during quantitative research and standardised methods of data gathering are utilised to describe the relationship between variables.

The researcher made use of quantitative research methods to establish if the psychosocial functioning and work performance of an employee are affected after exposure to a critical incident, hereby testing if the hypothesis is true of false.

After concluding that the hypothesis was either true or false, the researcher used qualitative research methods to establish how and to what extent psychosocial functioning and work performance of the employee was effected.

1.6   TYPE OF RESEARCH

1.6.1   Applied research

Applied research, according to Huysamen (1994:35), is conducted specifically to resolve specific social, psychological or educational problems. De Vos (1998:69) mentions that applied research has a specific intervention mission. Applied research attempts to find solutions to practical problems. Grinnell (1993a:16) argues that applied research is useable. Applied research is also referred to as intervention research, which implies that knowledge obtained from this research should be used to encourage change and development.

For the purpose of this study the researcher made use of applied research. The study purpose was not only to contribute to the knowledge field of social work but, by gaining knowledge, also to attempt solving certain problems and to use the knowledge to the advantage of people. If the study was to confirm that the psychosocial functioning and work performance of clients exposed to critical incidents were affected, this knowledge could be used to motivate the importance and advantages of critical incident stress management (CISM) for the employee and the corporate client.

1.7   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Tripodi (in Grinnell, 1981:198), the research design includes the total research process. He states that "the purpose of research designs is to provide a set of systematic procedures for producing data pertaining to the development, modification or expansion of knowledge." The research design is the framework that provides structure and gives specific strategies to conclude research successfully.

As part of the quantitative design the researcher decided to use the randomised one-group post-test-only design. This design, according to Fouché and De Vos (2002:143), is categorised as a quasi-experimental or associative design. Although subjects are randomly assigned, there is no pre-test and, therefore, comparison with a control group is not possible. Members of the group are randomly selected for inclusion in the sample. From the records of the Careways call centre, the researcher drew a random sample of affiliates seeing employees referred to the call centre due to exposure to a critical incident within the last year.

The phenomenological approach was used by the researcher as a qualitative strategy for the proposed study. According to Creswell (1998:56), a phenomenological study is a study that describes the meaning that experiences of a phenomenon, topic or concept has for various individuals. Fouché (2002b:275) mentions that the researcher utilising this approach reduces the experiences of individuals to a central meaning or the essence of the experience. The product of the research is a description of the essence of the experience being studied. Phenomenology tries to understand and interpret the meaning subjects give to their everyday lives. The researcher should understand the "life setting of the subject and place himself in the shoes of the subject". Participant observation and unstructured interviews can be utilised as ways of data collection.

1.7.1 Data collection

Table 1: Methods of data collection

Method of data collection	Design		Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of questionnaires returned	Response rate
Questionnaires to clients	Quantitative	One-group post-test design	80	54	67,5%
Questionnaires to therapists			80	54	67,5%
Semi-structured interview – clients	Qualitative	Phenomenological design	**Number of interviews conducted**	**Number of interviews conducted**	**Response rate**
			54	12	22,22%
Semi-structured interview – Managers/ Supervisors			54	3	5,55%
Document analysis			54	54	100%

1.7.1.1 Quantitative data collection

As part of the one-group post-test design, the researcher quantitatively collected data to determine which employees were affected by critical incidents. With the assistance of the

Careways national call centre, clients who experienced a critical incident in the past year were identified. Data were collected by posted questionnaires. The questionnaire explained the purpose of the study and gathered information regarding the impact of the critical incident to establish if their psychosocial functioning and work performance were affected.

1.7.1.2 Qualitative data collection

As part of the phenomenological design, the researcher qualitatively collected data to establish how employees' psychosocial functioning and work performance were affected and the effect of intervention. Employees who responded to the questionnaire were used as a target group. Respondents who participated in the quantitative study were requested to indicate if they would like to take part in the qualitative study. With their permission, records of their assessment and intervention kept by The Careways Group were utilised for document analysis.

Seeing that data were recorded by an affiliate therapist (social worker/psychologist), existing data or case notes regarding the client's intervention were analysed. This data refer to official documents, according to Bailey (1990:294), seeing that they were compiled and maintained on a continuous basis by the Careways call centre. The data, however, were of a personal nature because they contained information regarding employees' personal problems. Document study, as a qualitative data collection method, was used to gather information and to identify main themes. These themes gave direction and formed the basis of an interview schedule constructed by the researcher and used in a semi-structured one-to-one interview as method of data collection. The semi –structured one-to-one interview is not typical for a phenomenological study, but rather unstructured interviews. Due to the fact that it was decided before the study commenced that similar information from the employee and the manager is needed in other to compare, semi-structured interviews was used as data collection method.

Semi-structured interviews, according to Greeff (2002:302) are used "to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about, or perceptions of, a particular topic." The interview schedule provides the researcher with a set of predetermined questions that may be used as an appropriate instrument to engage the participant and to designate the narrative, according to Holstein and Gubruim (in Greeff, 2002:302). The interview schedule forces the researcher

to think explicitly about what he/she hopes to cover in the interview and what difficulties he/she might encounter.

1.7.2   Data analysis

1.7.2.1   Quantitative data analysis

As part of the one-group post-test-design the researcher analysed data univariatly and bivariatly. The purpose of the one-group post-test-design was to determine in what way employees were affected by critical incidents. The researcher was interested in determining how many employees were the victims of a critical incident (univariate analysis) and the relationship between the critical incident and the employees' work performance and psychosocial functioning (bivariate analysis). According to De Vos, Fouché and Venter (2002:225), univariate analysis is the simplest form of data analysis and means that one variable is analysed, mainly with a view to describe that variable. All the data regarding the specific variable are summarised for easy comprehension and utilisation. The summarised data can be portrayed in different ways, for example tabular or graphical displays.

In bivariate analyses, according to De Vos *et al.* (2002:240), the researcher is interested in the relationship between variables, and the researcher poses the following questions: Does a relationship between the variables exist? If such a relationship exists, what is the direction, positive or negative? How strong is the positive or negative relationship? The bivariate analysis to be used will depend on the type of variables involved. If both the variables are of the categorical type, data will be reflected as a cross-tabulation. In the case of row and column percentages, a clustered bar chart can be drawn to reflect variables.

1.7.2.2   Qualitative data analysis

As part of the phenomenological design, the researcher decided to analyse qualitative data as follow:

1.7.2.2.1   Process of qualitative data analysis

According to De Vos (2002:340–344), data analysis and interpretation can be represented as a spiral image, the data analysis spiral. This means that the researcher moves in annalistic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. In this process the researcher touches

several facets of analysis, circling around and "upwards" towards the completion of the process.

- **Data collection and recording**

  The first step in qualitative data analysis is to plan to record data in a systematic way, even before data collection starts. A qualitative study involves an inseparable relation between data collection and data analysis. As data are gathered, they are analysed. Data analysis may necessitate revision in data collection procedures and strategies. New data collected after revisions in collecting procedures are subjected to new analysis. The result of this process is the effective collection of rich data that may generate new questions or hypotheses and provide the basis of a shared construction of reality. The researcher uses the same methodological tools in conducting data analysis during data collection to ensure trustworthiness of the study, such as triangulation, development of a working hypothesis and testing of a working hypothesis.

- **Managing data**

  This is the step in data analysis away from the collection site and the first "leap" in the data analysis process. The researcher uses different techniques to code and organise collected data. The purpose of data management is to give the researcher the opportunity to organise data, making data easily retrievable and enhancing their manipulability.

- **Reading and writing memos**

  After the organisation and conversion of data, the researcher continues analysis by getting an overview of the whole database. This is a process of reading the data and re-reading it to become familiar with the data. In this process of exploring the database, the researcher should keep short memorandums in the margin about ideas or concepts that occur to the researcher while reading. This process is important because it helps the researcher to identify data that may be overwhelming and unmanageable.

- **Describing, classifying and interpreting**

  In this loop of the spiral, category formation represents the heart of qualitative data analysis. The researcher starts by working through collected data, trying to identify salient themes, recurring ideas or language and patterns of belief that link people and settings together and to describe them. After describing, the researcher classifies data by taking

the text of qualitative information apart by looking for categories, themes or dimensions of information. After classification, the interpretation of data follows, which means making sense of the data, to look at what "lessons" were learned in the process. The purpose of interpretation is to make meaningful conclusions and recommendations.

- **Representing and visualising**

   This is the final phase of the data analysis spiral. The researcher presents his/her findings and data in text, tabular or graphic form. Visual presentation of data includes a comparison matrix or tables, hypotheses, metaphors and statistical information.

1.8   PILOT STUDY

1.8.1   Feasibility of the study

According to Strydom (2002b:213), apart from studying relevant literature and interviewing experts, it is also necessary to obtain an overview of the actual practical situation where the prospective investigation will be executed. The researcher should at this stage of the pilot study address the goals and objectives, resources, research population, procedures of data collection, the data gathering itself and possible errors that may occur during the study. Preliminary exploratory studies can be of value in the practical planning of the research project, for example the transport, finances and time factors.

As an affiliate social worker for The Careways Group the researcher has some knowledge of the actual, practical situation where the investigation was executed. The researcher did, however, conduct a preliminary exploratory study to familiarise him with the practical situation, the procedures and policies of The Careways Group and the identified corporate client, as well as the feasibility of the prospective project.

According to Huysamen (1994:205), the purpose of a pilot study is to determine the feasibility of the research project and to identify possible problems in the measuring procedures and the operationalisation of variables. A pilot study helps the researcher to identify possible problems in terms of the time frame, the availability of respondents, costs involved and the permission of respondents.

Written approval to continue with the study was given by Dr van Jaarsveld (Director Group Affairs, The Careways Group). The Careways Group agreed to identify a corporate client for the purpose of the study and respondents for the study were available within the workforce of the corporate client. The Careways Group indicated that respondents for the research project would be available for the study after final permission for the research project had been granted. Although the researcher did not foresee major difficulties in the implementation of the project, possible difficulties could have been confidentiality issues regarding respondents, and cost factors. Not using names or identifying companies of clients could assure confidentiality of client information. Possible financial assistance by the Careways Group could help to cut high costs of the research for the researcher.

1.8.2   Pilot test of the data collection instrument

A pilot study implies that the researcher should expose a few cases that are similar to the planned main inquiry to exactly the same procedures as are planned for the main investigation, in order to modify the measuring instrument (Strydom, 2002b:215). Miller (1983:100) suggests that when selecting the cases the correct selection procedures should be used. This contributes to the emergence of meaningful insights that can be helpful in the modification of the final questionnaire and/or interview schedule.

The researcher selected respondents according to the systematic sampling method as a probability sampling procedure from the population for the purposes of the pilot study. It helped the researcher to identify deficiencies in the questionnaire and helped the researcher to plan the contents for the interview schedule.

1.8.2.1   Quantitative study

The researcher used a questionnaire as data collection instrument in the quantitative section of the study. The purpose of the quantitative study was to establish if there was a relation between critical incidents, the work performance and psychosocial functioning of the employee. Research respondents were selected according to probability sampling procedure and specifically using the systematic sampling method that was included in the pilot test. According to Strydom and Venter (2002:205), only the first respondent is selected randomly, thereafter all the other respondents are selected according to a particular interval, for example every fifth or tenth respondent on a list of names. This implies that the first

respondent on the list of affiliates exposed to a critical incident provided by the Careways call centre was selected randomly; thereafter respondents were selected according to a specific interval, namely every tenth respondent on the name list. The researcher included two respondents in the pilot study. Respondents who participated in the pilot study were not included in the main investigation.

1.8.2.2   Qualitative study

Respondents selected for the pilot study were representative of those who were expected to be involved in the research project. The qualitative study was interested in establishing how the work performance and psychosocial functioning of employees exposed to a critical incident were affected and if the intervention of the EAP contributed to their recovery. Only respondents who had indicated in the questionnaire of the first part of the study that they were interested to be further involved in the study were included in the qualitative study. An interview according to a semi-structured interview schedule was used as method of data collection in the qualitative study. The researcher made use of volunteer sampling as a non-probability sampling technique in the qualitative study. Respondents had the opportunity to volunteer for further inclusion in the study by indicating so in the questionnaire. According to Strydom and Delport (2002:332), a statistically correct pilot study plays a less important role in a qualitative study than in a quantitative study. In a qualitative study the pilot study is usually informal and a few respondents possessing the same characteristics as those in the main investigation are involved. The researcher included one respondent as part of the qualitative pilot study. The respondents were subjected to an interview according to a semi-structured interview schedule as planned in the main investigation. The purpose of the pilot study was to establish whether the relevant data could be obtained from the respondents. The pilot study enabled the researcher to test his questions and interviewing schedule in order to make modifications for the data collection in the main investigation. After the pilot study, the interview schedule was modified as it was evident that question 10 in the original interview schedule for both employees and managers was a duplication of question 9. Question 10 was removed from both the semi-structured interview schedule for employees and managers (see Appendix 5 and 6).

1.9 RESEARCH POPULATION, BOUNDARY OF THE SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD

Arkava and Lane (1983:27) distinguish between the terms *universe* and *population*. *Universe* refers to all the potential subjects who have the attributes that the researcher is interested in. The term *population* refers to the boundaries set on a study unit. Neuman (1994:195) refers to *population* as the researcher's demarcation of the sample unit, the geographical location and the temporary boundaries of the population. Babbie (1992:198) refers to a population as "the theoretically specified aggregation of study elements".

For the purpose of this study, the universe included all the employees of all the corporate clients that received EAP services from The Careways Group. The population included all the employees identified by The Careways Group for the purposes of this study who were exposed to a critical incident in the 12-month period, starting from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007.

For the **quantitative study** of the research, respondents (affiliate therapists) were selected according to the probability sampling procedure and specifically using the systematic sampling method which was also included in the pilot test. The therapist then used the definition provided for traumatic events to identify any clients in his/her current caseload to be part of the study. According to Strydom and Venter (2002:205), only the first respondent is selected randomly, thereafter all the other respondents are selected according to a particular interval, for example every fifth or tenth respondent on a list of names. This implies that the first respondent on the list of affiliate therapists provided by the Careways call centre was selected randomly, thereafter respondents were selected according to a specific interval, in this case every second affiliate therapist on the name list.

The researcher obtained a list of affiliate therapists working for the Careways Group as a therapist.

In the **qualitative study** of the research project that followed the quantitative study, the researcher made use of volunteer sampling as a non-probability sampling procedure. Volunteer sampling refers to persons who come forward voluntarily, to be part of the research project. Respondents had the opportunity to volunteer for further inclusion in the study by

indicating so in the questionnaire. The researcher planned to include ten to 12 respondents as part of the qualitative study. Certain criteria were set to select respondents who volunteered for further inclusion in the study, for example only employees exposed to violent critical incident such as bank robberies, vehicle accidents or hijacking incidents within a specific timeframe (last 12 months). Grinnell (1993a:162) mentions that, with non-probability sampling, the probability of selection cannot be estimated, so there is little or no support for the claim that the sample is representative of the population of which it was drawn.

1.10 ETHICAL ISSUES

1.10.1 Voluntary participation

According to Babbie (1992:424), participation in research disrupts a person's normal activities and requires that people reveal personal information about themselves. The researcher, therefore, would only include respondents who volunteered to be part of the study and no one was forced to participate in the study.

1.10.2 No harm to respondents

Strydom (2002b:64) mentions that in the social sciences the risk for harm is mainly emotional. It is the researcher's responsibility to protect and to minimise any possible harm respondents may be subjected to. Although harm could not be anticipated, it was decided that respondents who were emotionally harmed in this study would be referred to a therapist for counselling provided by an affiliate counsellor of The Careways Group.

1.10.3 Informed consent

Respondents should be informed about the goal of the investigation, possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers and the credibility of the researcher before participation in the study (Strydom, 2002b:65).

The researcher discussed ethical issues with respondents in order for them to make an informed decision before participating in the research project. Respondents gave consent in writing that they understood the consequences of being part of the study. The researcher contracted with respondents participating in the qualitative study. The signed contract ensured that both the researcher and respondent were obliged to handle all information

regarding the project and participants as confidential. Strydom (2002b:65) emphasises that the researcher must make sure that respondents are legally and psychologically competent to give consent, and they should be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time.

1.10.4 Deception of respondents

Deception of respondents refers to the misleading of respondents by withholding information or by giving incorrect information. Judd, Smith and Kidder (1991:496–497) mention that there are mainly three reasons why respondents may be deceived:

- To disguise the real goal of the study
- To hide the real function of the actions of the respondents
- To hide the experiences that respondents will go through.

The researcher was open and honest with respondents, and gave them as much information as possible regarding the proposed study.

1.10.5 Anonymity and confidentiality

Babbie (1992:467) states that the greatest concern in research is to protect the identity of respondents. A respondent's identity can be protected by ways of anonymity and confidentiality.

- Anonymity means that the researcher should not be able to identify any respondent after the research project has been completed; in other words, the researcher should not be able to link a given response with a given respondent.
- Confidentiality implies that the researcher is able to identify respondents and their responses, but makes a commitment to handle information confidentially.

For the purposes of the study, the researcher ensured confidentiality to respondents. Owing to the fact that the researcher made use of scheduled interviews as way of qualitative data collection, it was not possible to ensure anonymity. The researcher made use of pseudonyms when discussing individual cases in the research report in order to protect respondents' anonymity.

1.10.6 Actions and competence of researcher

Strydom (2002a:69) mentions that researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent and adequately skilled to undertake a research project. The researcher ensured that he is theoretically up to date with research methodology by passing an oral examination on research methodology at the University of Pretoria.

1.10.7 Release or publication of findings

It is the responsibility of the researcher to accurately and objectively report the findings of the study. Strydom (2002a:72) states that the "information must be formulated and conveyed clearly and unambiguously to avoid or to minimize misappropriation by subjects, the general public and even colleagues". Researchers should be careful not to manipulate findings to confirm hypotheses or points of views. Babbie (1992:469) stresses the fact that the researcher should be honest and willing to admit shortcomings and failures of the research project.

1.10.8 Debriefing of respondents

The researcher arranged debriefing sessions after completion of the research project in order to assist respondents and to minimise harm. Strydom (2002a:73) mentions that the researcher can help to rectify misperceptions that arise while involved in the project. The researcher should be sensitive to possible emotions respondents may experience when the research project is nearing its end and respondents should be debriefed before termination by an independent therapist who has not been involved in the research process.

1.11 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.11.1 Crisis

Gilliland and James (1993:3) define a crisis as "a perception of an event or situation as intolerable difficult that exceeds the resources and coping mechanisms of a person. Unless a person obtains relief, the crisis has the potential to cause severe affective, cognitive and behavioural malfunctioning".

According to Plaggermars (2000:80), a crisis represents an acute emotional upset; less of equilibrium and an upset in a steady state, which temporarily hinders one's ability to employ previously, used problem-solving capacities.

Trauma creates a crisis by overwhelming a person's usual coping strategies. A crisis makes it difficult or impossible to conduct one's daily activities (Friedman, 2003:20).

The researcher views a crisis as a state of emotional disorganisation when a person was confronted with an obstacle he/she was not ready to handle, or lacked the capacity to handle at that moment. The inability to handle the obstacle caused emotional and behavioural difficulties for the person.

1.11.2 Critical incident

A critical incident refers to "an event that is extraordinary and produces significant reactions for the intervening person". It may be so unusual that it overwhelms the natural abilities that people have to cope with difficult situations. It may lead to stress, burnout or even PTSD (Lewis, 1996:15).

A critical incident, according to O'Conner and Jeavons (2002:53), is an extraordinary event that has the potential to cause unusually strong emotional reactions.

Solomon (1986:30) sees a critical incident as "any situation in which one feels overwhelmed by a sense of vulnerability and/or lack of control over the situation".

Although the last definition may seem very broad, the researcher agrees that when defining a critical incident the focus should be on the reaction of the individual. The researcher, therefore, defined a critical incident as "any incident that causes emotional distress for a person, and which affects his/her psychosocial functioning temporarily or permanently to some extent".

1.11.3 Trauma

Trauma, according to Sonderup (1996:14), necessitates the presence of a traumatic event. This can be defined as an extraordinary event or series of events which are sudden, overwhelming and often dangerous, either to the individual or significant others.

Any (unpleasant) psychological experience that has a negative influence, usually with long-term effects, on the personality development of a person, for example an accident or death of a loved one, can be described as a trauma (Plug, Louw, Gouws & Meyer, 1997:385).

A traumatic event (Plaggarmars, 2000:80) is more severe than a crisis and has a more unpredictable onset.

The researcher defined trauma as an event or an experience that was threatening to the emotional well-being of a person; it had a negative and usually long-term effect on the psychosocial functioning of the person.

1.11.4 Work performance

Work performance, according to Ivancevich and Matteson (1987:564),"is determined by an interaction of ability and motivation". Personal characteristics of the employee have a detrimental effect on the work performance of the employee (Milkovich & Bourdreau, 1991:91). These characteristics influence the employee's ability to perform his/her duties and the effectiveness to which this duty is carried out. Arnold and Feldman (1998:24–25) refer to five factors which may influence the work performance of the employee, namely motivation, skills, perception, personality and the availability of organisational systems and resources that can support the employee in the execution of his/her duties.

Exposure to a critical incident may seriously affect the perception, motivation and to a certain extent the personality of an employee. This may have a detrimental effect on the work performance of the employee.

The availability of organisational systems and resources, which can support an employee, can further determine the employee's recovery from a critical incident and his/her work performance.

1.11.5 Employee assistance programme

The Standards Committee of EAPA South Africa (2010:1) defines EAP as "the work organizations resource, based on core technologies or functions, to enhance employee and workplace effectiveness through prevention, identification and resolution of personal and productivity issues.

Lombard (1995:423) defines EAPs as "'n reeks beleids- en program procedures deur 'n bedryfsonderneming gesanksioneer om aangewend te word as intervensie by die identifisering van en hulpverlening aan werknemers met probleme wat hulle werksprestasie direk of indirek benadeel of kan benadeel. Dit is dus 'n generiese entiteit in die vorm van 'n bepaalde ondernemingsbeleid en prosedures wat aangewend moet word vir die identifisering van en reaksie op persoonlike en emosionele probleme van werknemers wat inmeng met hulle werksprestasie of dit kan benadeel."

Lombard (1995:423) defines EAP as "a series of policy and programme procedures, sanctioned by an enterprise, to be applied as an intervention for identifying and assisting employees with problems that may impair their job performance, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, it is a generic entity in the form of a particular enterprise policy and procedures that must be used for the identification of and response to employees' personal and emotional problems that interfere with or can impair their job performance" [translated by researcher]

The Careways Group has a holistic approach towards wellness and provides a comprehensive range of wellness and health related services for executives, managers and employees. These include: psycho-social services, trauma, incapacity, HIV/AIDS and disease management, health and safety services, absenteeism, fatigue and lifestyle management, together with legal and financial services. EAP falls within this holistic approach and provide the core values that a more extensive and holistic wellness approach was developed from.

The researcher is of the opinion that the focus of the EAPs is to support employees in an organisation in order to improve their work performance. The support implies help with problems of a personal nature, such as family, marriage, dependence, health, financial, emotional and stress-related problems, which may have a negative influence on the work performance of the employee.

1.12 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In conclusion after overviewing the evolvement and outcomes of the study it was evident that there were certain limitations in the study. The limitations can be listed as follow:

- Participation.

  In the quantitative study the response rate was 67.5% resulting in only 54 respondents participating in the study. In a quantitative study the ideal is to have a larger number of respondents involved. Due to the specific research population only 80 respondents could be identified for inclusion in the study. The response rate of the research population is therefore satisfactory.

  In the qualitative study the response rate for semi-structured interviews with employees and managers was relatively low. The fact that the researcher requested employees to volunteer to further participate in the qualitative part of the study probably contributed to the diminutive number of participants that participated. The fact that only 3 managers participated in the study was partly because employees might have reservations for the researcher to make contact with the manager despite the fact that confidentiality was guaranteed. Other reasons for poor manager participation were unavailability and contact details that have changed.

- Phenomenological design

  In the phenomenological design unstructured interviews is typically used as data collection method. In the study it was decided to use semi- structured interviews in order to ensure that data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with employees and the semi-structured interviews with managers has the same focus and that results could be compared.