

## CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, interprets and discusses the results of the present study. Four main themes emerged from the data. They are:

What being a police officer means

Traumatic incidents

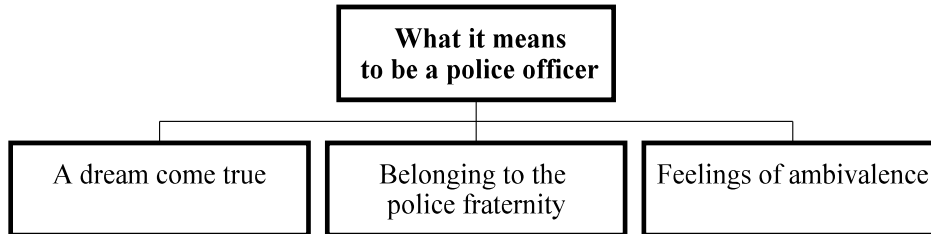
Organisational stressors

Transformation

The category of what it means to be a police officer includes the following subthemes: (1) A dream come true; (2) Belonging to the police fraternity; (3) Feelings of ambivalence toward the work. The traumatic incidents category includes participants' perceptions of trauma encountered in their working environment. The category of organisational stressors includes the following subthemes: (1) Training; (2) Support and recognition; (3) Perceptions about commanders and management; (4) The impact of organisational stressors on relationships; (5) Coping skills. The category of transformation includes the subthemes: (1) Racial issues; (2) Representivity; (3) Unclear line of command; (4) The effect of the change; (5) Uncertainty and unfairness as stressors.

The results and discussion of these thematic areas will include the diverse experiences of the participants of the study as well as a psychodynamic interpretation of relevant themes. Given the complex and multidimensional nature of trauma, thematic categories should not be regarded as watertight and mutually exclusive.

## 6.2 What being a police officer means



Choosing to become a police officer entails much more than a mere vocational decision. Being a police officer is often the most salient feature of a person’s identity and thus the job almost becomes enshrined in his being. Police officers often define themselves through their job and the policing organisation. Being a police officer in a sense means an enmeshment of identity, psyche and employment.

### 6.2.1 A dream come true

Becoming a police officer is often a boyhood dream come true. In psychodynamic terms, graduation day at a police training college confirms the young officer’s unconscious feeling that he has fulfilled the expectations of his ego ideal. “He has become the strongest, the bravest and the most competent of men<sup>1</sup> by having become a policeman” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.69).

*Since I was a little boy I always wanted to become a Policeman. (P)*

The gender issue of masculinity figures strongly in the data and as Connel (2001) explains masculinities are “configurations of practice or cultural resources generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationship” (p.7). The dominant form of masculinity has a crucial role to play in defining how boys and men are supposed to act in order to be acceptably male. The “approved” mode of being male

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<sup>1</sup> Literature focuses almost exclusively on male persons and as such the chapter may seem gender biased. However, since all participants in the study are male, “he” instead of “she” will be used.

is associated with heterosexuality, toughness, power and authority, competitiveness and the subordination of gay men (Goldman, 2003). The perceived role of being a policeman corresponds almost one hundred percent to the dominant societal “approved” mode of masculinity.

This realisation of one’s ego ideal (which embraces masculinity) is clearly visible in members of the Special Task Force (STF) who are seen by other police officers as “the strongest, the bravest and the most competent of men”.

*There is also the pride of belonging in such a unit as the STF as there is a lot of respect and admiration shown by fellow policemen, family and all those boys who never pursued their dream in this direction. It’s good to be part of the few elite, determined through hardship. It is strange and possibly can be considered barbaric but deep within men there still seems to be a system of respect for another man who physically can achieve something through hardship and perseverance with the human body, where most other men falter. (N)*

The need to be respected and admired for having manly attributes or being “a man” as opposed to “a boy” comes across clearly in this segment. The unconscious message is that a boy can only become a man through brotherhood within a unit such as the STF. The value and meaning attached to toughness, power and competitiveness as attributes of masculinity become clear. The degree of masculinity is related to the severity of the hardships endured. The unconscious dream in this sense is the dream of being acknowledged as male, as a man.

*I have wanted to join the STF since I was a young boy knowing that this would enable me to enjoy as much action one could experience during your lifetime. The biggest high in my life was when I joined the STF. (J)*

Again a boyhood dream comes true and the need for action and adventure is voiced. Talking about the “high” clearly indicates the addictive component involved in policing. Using words such as “belonging”, “being part of” and “joined” emphasise the need to belong, to conform. As Goldman (2003) points out, there is a “patriarchal dividend” or reward for conformity, but there is also a sense of exclusion that many

men will feel in their failure to live up to expectations. This will be addressed later in this discussion.

***The Special Task Force provides the position of not being able to achieve higher in this line of expertise within the SAPS. With this in mind, I can possibly be seen as someone who never grew up or at least stuck to my boyhood dreams of becoming a special forces operative, as most young boys do. (N)***

A special forces operative can most probably be seen as the most masculine presentation of maleness. The boyhood dreams can be seen as the ego ideal. “The policeman who feels powerful, superior, and heroic at these moments is savouring a kind of pleasure that few people can enjoy - he has met the demands of his ego ideal” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.81). Goldman (2003) concurs that most boys and men cannot hope to fit into the “ideal” perception of masculinity. The STF unit (or the police force<sup>2</sup>) acts as an instrument through which boys can become men. This is one reason why it is perceived as extremely important by participants that their unit (or organisation) should be able to cater for these needs. This will be expanded upon later in the discussion.

Participants mention that being a police officer forms part of their identity, their self-concept. The job is inescapably part of the officer’s identity, with the implied message: for better or for worse, you are stuck with being a police officer. A further perception is that being a police officer becomes an identifiable entity or a certain “personality”.

***It is said by police officials: You are a born police officer and you will remain like that for your whole life. (B)***

For some participants the job acquires a spiritual<sup>3</sup> dimension.

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<sup>2</sup> The word “force” obviously carries more power, authority and masculine strength than “service” and as such the name change to SAPS holds profound implications for the masculine identity of its members.

<sup>3</sup> Spiritual is used here within the framework of concern with things of the spirit and not as a synonym for religious.

***The work I do is very important to me and is more than just a “job”, it’s a calling. (R)***

***Everyone in the Service has got the chance to make a difference to the community and has got an obligation to serve and protect their fellow South Africans. (P)***

It is almost as if the job of policing is moved into a ethereal realm. In accordance with the literature, the dream of becoming a policeman is often connected with the notion of making a difference, to be of service and to be meaningful (Preiss & Ehrlich, 1966; Symonds, 1972; Van Maanen, 1977).

***You experience a tremendous sense of satisfaction when you respond to a complaint, encounter the accused at the scene, arrest the accused and the community thanks you for your quick response. That makes you feel as if you are still worth something.(B)***

“Still worth something” is the opposite of worthlessness or impotency and to be “potent” is crucial to masculinity. Gratification is found in the act of being competent and productive as well as being perceived as such. Being recognised as important and special by the public gives meaning to his being.

***It feels good to be able to make a difference. Any good arrest or good work performed during a shift makes it worthwhile, especially if you receive the necessary recognition from your commander or members of the public.(M)***

It is considered important to make a difference and to be recognised as such by the public and management alike. “Making a difference” means one is capable, strong and potent, the antithesis of impotent. Public recognition and admiration are especially important for police officers, as this constitutes an important source of personal gratification in psychodynamic terms.

***It is a privilege to work with the public in most instances, as some do openly appreciate your help and assistance. It makes me proud to be a member of the SAPS. (R)***

Being of assistance to others implies a power imbalance in psychodynamic terms and is connected to the (often unconscious) wish to be identified by himself and others as brave, powerful and virtuous - important masculine attributes.

*I can probably go on continuously to express the adrenalin rush, the fulfilment that one receives from performing his duties courageously, selflessly-sacrificing to protect the country and its people. (G)*

These feelings of bravery, powerfulness and righteousness are highly addictive and contain a strong spiritual element. Because of this police officers are severely disillusioned by the public's negative reaction toward their efforts to be of service. This is experienced as a harsh blow to their ego.

*In 1993 we were sent back to the East Rand to try and bring stability to the region as renewed and vicious fighting broke out between the IFP and ANC supporters, in the build up to the first democratic election in 1994. In the centre of these fighting factions were the SAP members that was targeted by everybody with a gun. (L)*

The unfairness of being targeted for bringing stability is voiced by the participant. The police officer's need to be recognised as "the good cop" is affected by the public's ambivalence toward him which stem from the citizen's unconscious image of the officer as a good or bad parent in psychodynamic terms (as discussed in chapter four). In South Africa, the police was historically mostly perceived as the opposition or enemy by a majority of the population because of political reasons and practises (as discussed in chapter two). Partly because of this external threat and a shared cultural background, a strong in-group fraternity existed which acted as a "trauma membrane" to protect police officers from experiencing symptoms of traumatisation.

### **6.2.2 Belonging to the police fraternity**

Being a police officer means being part of a brotherhood. The police fraternity or family serves a dual purpose, namely support where officers rely on one another for survival and support, and secondly, point of reference in defining the self. According to the psychodynamic perspective, this sense of belonging to a police fraternity is a highly gratifying emotional experience for the police officer, which impacts on his self-

concept.

***The camaraderie amongst police officers is very, very important.*** (R)

Identification with the peer group fosters a primitive narcissistic gratification and a sense of power. In accordance with the literature, the theme of peer solidarity is regarded as valuable by the participants and is linked to concepts of trust and safety. The sense of camaraderie develops as members go through the same selection and training process and thus they trust one another.

***I also felt confident that I could rely on anyone in the unit to save my life if necessary and that I would do the same for them.*** (A)

One almost gets a sense of the officers being “blood-brothers” in a unit. Also, the officer’s sense of self-confidence seems to be related to his perception of his brothers’ competence.

Yet, the police organisation is an extremely large one and work is done in smaller groups and units. It is these smaller units that are considered to be important reference points by the participants, rather than the organisation at large. This insert suggests that the trusting and supportive relationship of solidarity is limited to members from the specific unit and does not extend to the organisation as a whole. The data show that the *exclusivity* of the group as well as their *specialised skills* are considered as extremely important by the participants and are linked to the inherent need to feel (and be considered as) special. This relates to the unit’s role as vehicle through which the boy can become a man. The members of the Special Task Force accord great value to belonging to the most elite unit in the SAPS and to be recognised nationally and internationally as being “the best”. This need is embodied in the unit’s name.

***It’s good to be part of the few elite, determined through hardship.*** (N)

“To be part of” again indicates a sense of belonging, of ownership which is made valuable through the hardship endured.

Members of the Highway Patrol echo this sense that it is meaningful to be considered as special, to be trained in doing things that “other” police officers cannot do. These positive feelings are associated with having a certain amount of status by belonging to an elitist unit, and of focusing on “high priority crimes” rather than petty ones. The fact that one had to perform above the average to be selected into specific units, as well as the specialised training and hardship that sets one apart from the rest, are also mentioned as important factors in the participants’ positive experiences.

*When I first started at this unit, I was extremely motivated and so was everybody else. HP was seen as an elite unit. All of us went through a gruelling selection process to be part of this unit. We were all proud and keen to combat hijackings and other high priority crimes... We were also well trained in SWAT and I felt that we could handle any conflict situation.*(A)

*We went through a stringent selection process and literally bled to be part of what was then an elite unit. I was incredibly proud to be part of HP. (B)*  
*It feels good to form part of an elite unit. I sweated blood to get there and it feels good when other police members from the stations look up at you.*  
*It also feels good to perform your duty in a BMW vehicle. (M)*

The frequent references to the hardships endured might stress the point of how really special they are to have survived all of this. On another level, it might say something of what they sacrificed to have achieved this much (they have literally bled). Sacrifice carries an element of spirituality. The reference to bleeding, the suffering survived as well as the fact that all members were males of the same age group, echo the African initiation rituals which boys must undergo to become men. These initiation rituals are strictly gender exclusive and tradition prescribes that no female may even lay her eyes on the boys during the process of initiation. Mixing genders is totally unacceptable during these traditional initiation ceremonies.

From these inserts it is apparent that each person needs to be feel unique and more special than other police members and it seems as if membership of specific units is used as vessel to gratify this narcissistic need. In a similar way, members of the Crime Combatting unit also define their worth through the specialised duties which they



perform. When the other or “normal” police cannot handle a situation, they are deployed into the area.

*Being a member of the Public Order Policing Unit means that one is mostly deployed to places that have high crime rates where we have to stabilise the situation after other police members have failed.* (K)

The collective need to be seen as special may act as binding factor in the police fraternity.

### 6.2.3 Feelings of ambivalence toward the work

In accordance with the literature discussions (Anderson, n.d; Bonifacio, 1991), police officers experience ambivalent feelings toward their job. They simultaneously love and hate the work that they do. On the one hand they are addicted to the excitement, unpredictability and the danger which are often experienced as exhilarating.

*Being a member of STF means that your days are filled with highs in every possible aspect. When the bell at the office rings, signalling that a job has come down, seeing everyone running to their lockers to get geared up and the charge off to face danger of an unknown kind is possibly the most fulfilling experience of my job. The level of the high is sometimes so addictive ...* (J)

*The work that we do is dangerous, but it somehow stays enjoyable, exciting. I think the adrenaline plays a part in this unusual experience.* (B)

Being exposed to danger is one way through which men may prove or demonstrate their power, toughness or masculinity. This is a challenge which they often find exhilarating.

On the other hand they are often disillusioned by the misery and destructiveness they see daily, as well as their own fear.

*I joined the then Unit 19, as the prospect of working all over South Africa, and in the most dangerous townships appealed to me, little knowing that in the first month, of working in the East Rand Townships, my outlook on life and of people would be changed for ever. Going on a “trip” (detached*

*duties) was like going on holiday, except that behind every wall and every window there may be someone trying to take your life. Just because you wore a camouflaged uniform. Being shot at, by an unknown enemy, is probably the rudest way in which you can be made aware of your real surroundings. The first time hearing shots hitting your Casspir, makes you pray that the armoured steel tube in which you are sitting can withstand the onslaught. Then the training you received and that was drilled into you takes over. The order to debus is given and you exit the safety of the vehicle to fight on the ground where you can move towards the unseen threat, and eliminate it. The adrenaline rush makes everything seems sharper. The exchange of fire between the SAP and the enemy that lasts for only a few seconds but feels like forever. As things get quiet you take time to check if you are still in one piece, and you are happy to find that you are. (L)*

This insert vividly illustrates Anderson's (n.d.) description of an officer being "shocked" by a world that he did not know existed. Police officers are trained to disassociate from emotions and to act behaviourally: "*Then the training you received and that was drilled into you takes over*", and the fear of being hit is disassociated. The emotions are shut off and the officer becomes in a sense an automaton, acting on training and survival instincts. The participant mentions the distortion of time during a traumatic incident. While war is frightening and traumatic, combat may be characterised by periods of intense pleasurable stimulation (Grigsby, 1991). This insert further demonstrates the conscious distancing of the police officer between "us" in camouflaged uniform and "them", the enemy, the unseen threat that must be eliminated. This is consistent with the literature's reference to "numbed warfare" in which the enemy is reduced to nonhuman status (Lifton, 1972).

Participants talk about the numerous traumatic incidents, the diversity of the job and the variety of emotions experienced.

*There are too many incidents to mention. From pre-1994 riots and political upheaval to the present, where the criminal has more rights than the victims. I have stood over a number of colleagues' graves and have seen a lot of violence and death. I have seen the abuse of power, but I have also*

***seen the appreciation on the faces of people that have been relieved from the grip of fear and helplessness. (E)***

The contrast between helplessness and power is implied in this insert; Sometimes I am helpless and an onlooker at colleagues' funerals and other times I have the power to save others. The psychodynamic perspective on police work sees the ambivalence of the police officer towards the work as impacting on the core of his self-concept as a man and as a human being. When he feels helpless he is impotent (a lesser man) and when he is powerful he is formidable and indestructible.

Officer M had a dream of becoming a law enforcement officer but his self-concept is damaged by the law breaking in the organisation. His identity is linked to that of the police fraternity.

***It was a dream to become a Law Enforcement officer, but if I look at the corruption and all other law breaking incidents taking place around the Police Service it has become an embarrassment for me even to tell people that I am in the Service. (M).***

This is consistent with Symonds' (1972) statement that disillusionment and cynicism are the industrial hazards of police work.

### **6.3 Traumatic incidents**

Exposure to traumatic situations and scenes are an inevitable part of the job of policing. As part of normal daily duties, police officers encounter critical incidents of sudden injury and death (Gersons & Carlier, 1993). Most of the participants expect and accept this, which is in accordance with the literature which indicates that police officers report relatively low levels of death anxiety, despite their dangerous profession (Wenz, 1979).

***Trauma in my work is almost like a daily routine, we experience it almost everyday. (K)***

***The work of the SAPS STF is very dangerous and every time a member gets sent on a mission, his life is on the line. (S)***

Violanti and Aron (1994) suggest that police officers consistently rate the duty-related death of an officer as one of the most distressful events in their work. Although most participants experience the death of a colleague as traumatic, they do not consider it overwhelming.

*Another traumatic time for me, was the death of two of my colleagues in a state vehicle accident. One of them was our commander at the time and a very good friend of mine. This incident obviously affected the whole unit, but I don't think we were ever properly debriefed. Everyone had to deal with this in his/her own way. I feel I dealt with it, but these incidents will always stay with me. (A)*

The unit is talked about as a living entity. The whole unit was touched by the loss of two of its members and although they received no psychological intervention (which may be interpreted as support from management), the participant feels that he dealt with it in his own way. These incidents were integrated into his ego and became part of his history, and he considers this to be a normal way of coping with trauma.

*During this period a friend and I decided to join the SAPS Special Task Force. This friend was in the SA Police College with me and we did Counter Insurgency training together. During my second border duty that lasted 4 months, we had numerous serious contacts with terrorists and 2 days before we returned back to the RSA this friend of mine was killed. (S)*

Most police officers talk about a special relationship with a “buddy” which often developed early in their careers. Often the decision to join the police was taken in conjunction with this special friend. Buddy or dyadic relationships have the capacity to alleviate the danger of catastrophic anxiety through the creation of a lack of separateness between self and object (Modell, 1968). The loss of this relationship is often experienced as a narcissistic injury rather than an object loss (Fox, 1974) and shatters the officer's feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability.

*The death of a colleague, especially on duty is very traumatic and makes one wonder when is it my turn. (C)*

*This is when this kind of job becomes really hard. A friend, with whom you only shared a joke or a special conversation, just yesterday is killed and the*

***frustrations you feel, knowing that there is nothing you can do to save his life. Nothing.*** (J)

As indicated by the literature (Anderson, n.d; Bonifacio, 1991; Kroes, 1976), helplessness and powerlessness are especially frightening and painful feelings for a policeman to experience since they seriously affect his need to feel powerful and competent in order to survive in the street. It is important to note that feeling powerful, in control, skilled and competent are prerequisites to survival for a police officer. Feelings of helplessness and impotence impact on an officer's locus of control and mental well-being. A likely protection against these feelings of inadequacy is the utilisation of defence mechanisms, such as numbing, disassociation and denial (emotion-focused coping). The literature indicates that even though emotion-focused coping aids in maintaining emotional balance, the lack of problem-solving strategies appear to have negative implications for mental health (Billings & Moos, 1981; Mitchell et al., 1983; Solomon et al., 1988). However, the data indicate that the participants' defence mechanisms are successful in protecting the person from becoming overwhelmed by fear and anxiety.

***It was quite traumatic, especially if one thinks how different it could have been. While the shooting was carrying on, I was calm and thought rationally. But afterwards you start to shake and get scared if you realize what actually happened. What would I have said or done if something happened to my colleague? How would I have handled the guilt feelings?***  
(C)

One may speculate about this officer's assumption that it would have been his mistake or fault if something would have happened to his partner. Could this be related to feelings of grandiosity (he has the power to protect his colleague), the training (one is "responsible" for looking out for one's partner), or maybe a questioning of his actions in relation to the specific incident (did I do right by my actions)? "Mistake causing serious injury or death to a fellow member" was rated as the most traumatic event by police officials in the SAPS according to the study mentioned in chapter four (Psychological Services & SAITS, 2001). It seems as if there are two sides to this: firstly, the person's own internal guilt feelings play a role, and secondly, there is criticism and questioning from outside ("What would I have said or done if something

*happened to my colleague? ”*). Of further interest in this insert is the effectiveness of denial of his own death as defence mechanism - his partner might have gotten killed, but not him. This is similar to Tuohy’s (1968) finding of the soldier’s feelings of invulnerability upon arrival in Vietnam.

As was discussed in chapter four the matter of intent is also perceived as important by the participants, in other words, if something catastrophic happens intentionally, accidentally or because of a mistake. The element of intent or “reason” has an impact on the formulation of meaning. The data indicate that the way in which a colleague dies might play a role in the meaning attached to the incident. Furthermore, one might speculate whether defence mechanisms are more easily accessible to an police officer on duty than when he is off duty and not expecting to be traumatised.

*X, a fellow operator was killed on an operation in Y. Altogether he was shot 5 times during the house penetration going after a cop killer. I felt sad but strangely not sufficient enough to warrant any deep emotions. The view I have through my religion (Christianity), is one of the human being made up of body, soul and spirit. We simply have a destructible body here on earth as a mode of transport for our soul and spirit. If it is destroyed, we move on to the spiritual realm... Similarly, a fellow operator was run over by a tipper truck whilst out cycling. The shock of it was that it was unexpected and a real mess of a human that had so much going for him. I was initially shocked for the reason of realising that death comes to all persons, all too most when they don’t expect it. The shock wasn’t that there was death, but it was the last thing I expected to happen to this member. He seemed to have such a great future in front of him.(N)*

A sense of meaning was attached to the death of the police officer who was killed in pursuit of a “cop killer”; he died for a reason, whereas the death of the officer who was killed whilst cycling is regarded as senseless and devoid of meaning. The use of religious beliefs in seeking to attach meaning to traumatic experiences is clearly illustrated in the previous as well as in the next insert.

*Then there was X whose parachute did not open during a training jump at Y with the SANDF. He was with me in the plane and exited behind me. I was the first person to his body and had to deal with the sight and smell I saw. I did this by setting the example as I was the senior member from the police on the training intervention. I proceeded to handle the scene as professionally as possible without emotion, getting everybody involved. Once again my defence was to block out any emotional thoughts and replace them with the spiritual reality that his body is destroyed but he lives on elsewhere. (N)*

“The sight and smell I saw” emphasises the tangibility of the scene; the odour was almost visible. Presenting himself as tough is mandated by his peers as well as by the organisation who tells him in no uncertain terms that only toughness and emotional detachment are accepted (Skolnick, 1966). The police officer not only has to deny his emotions, he also has to present himself as tough, powerful and in control. Acting professionally implies acting without emotion. Police officers usually do not have the option of displaying intense fear, helplessness or horror (Anderson, n.d.). The data concur:

*Many incidents of members getting traumatically injured have happened in front of me. This year alone 3 members fell from heights during training exercises. It is a bone chilling noise you hear a full grown man make as he plummets to the ground. Then the inevitable thud and moaning. This has brought about serious injury. Most of the time we are far from decent medical help and have to assist our medics in doing the best they can until the member gets to a hospital. As the leader I still have to deal with the group’s shock and emotions. At the time of the event I tell the members to carry on with the exercise as the job in reality does not stop because a member gets injured or killed. I try to take everyone’s mind off the situation by intensifying the pace for awhile. My philosophy of death obviously doesn’t work here. The member is still alive - thus it does affect me to know that he may never recover to full normal physical status again. (N)*

Police officers have been trained to dissociate from, or suppress their emotions in order to endure the scene (Anderson, n.d.) and carry on with the task at hand. They seldom have the option of avoidance (of the traumatic situation) as a defence mechanism and are trained to respond behaviourally and not emotionally for they have to take control and handle the scene. In so doing a sense of control is restored to a certain degree and feelings of powerlessness averted.

Participants talk in a numbed, emotionally distant way of death and dying.

*During these trips numerous of my black colleagues were killed and more than 150 enemies were killed. I was involved in numerous skirmishes with terrorists<sup>4</sup> in the RSA, both in rural and urban environments. Many terrorists were killed. In the incidents where I was involved, not one Task Force member was killed. During my years in the SAPS STF, a number of members died. The first member of the Task Force died before I joined the unit. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was killed during a training course; one of my instructors was killed in a shooting accident. The 3<sup>rd</sup> member that was killed was in 1980 during a border trip. Four members were killed in car accidents. In hostage release operations, 2 members were killed... One member was killed in a parachute training exercise. His parachute did not open during a night jump and I was sent to search for and retrieve his body as he fell in Y [another country]. During the past couple of years, a number of the STF was wounded in skirmishes with criminals and terrorists. Some of the wounds sustained were serious and some of the wounded members recovered to some extent. (S)*

A distinction (conscious or unconscious) is made between the numerous deaths of Black (distancing) colleagues and the many deaths of enemies and terrorists (too many to keep count of and regarded as less important). However, this participant recounts each death of members belonging to his unit, even from times before he joined the

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<sup>4</sup> The word “terrorist” may be used appropriately here to indicate a certain sociohistoric context; or the use of a discourse which is currently politically incorrect may say something about this member’s positioning in terms of the transformation process.



unit. This is understandable in view of the intense identification with the brotherhood (good guys) and the distancing from the enemy as well as from people who are not part of the specific unit (“family”). What is further noteworthy is the observation that although a number of members died, none of these deaths occurred during “the incidents where I was involved”. This might be interpreted that “I did nothing wrong which caused members to be killed” or that the police officer feels that he performed his duties satisfactorily by not letting any harm come to the members under his command. In a sense, he has performed his “fatherly duty” by protecting his “sons”.

The extent and amount of trauma that South African police officers are exposed to are unimaginable and more comparable to traumatic exposure of peace-keeping forces than law enforcement agencies (Psychological Services & SAITS, 2001). A greater number of South African police officers are more regularly involved in shooting incidents than in most Western European and North American law enforcement agencies (Rodney, 1996). Consistent with findings in America, shooting incidents have been identified as constituting a major source of trauma in the SAPS (Rodney, 1996).

*While they were shooting at us I was afraid thinking that they are going to hit both of us as we were still seated in the vehicle. After arresting them I was shocked to see what firearms they were carrying. I saw three AK 47's and two R5 rifles. That incident traumatised me for a long time and I had to go for counselling to cope. (D)*

Other than the “normal” involvement with criminal activities, the SAPS were previously caught in the midst of political issues (discussed in chapter two). A participant vividly describes the effect that the political upheaval in the country had on him as a young man.

*As a young policeman I saw the ugly side of life very early on in my career. During 1992 I was deployed in the East Rand. The anti-apartheid struggle was raging fiercely, and attacks on the SAP and on innocent civilians was part of every day. The one scene that I will never forget as long as I live, happened in Vosloorus early in 1992. It was a bright, cold winter morning*

*when we were ordered to go to Vosloorus to patrol the taxi routes, as there have been attacks on commuters using taxis on these routes. As we were approaching one of the entrance routes into Vosloorus we observed thick black smoke that is usually given off when tyres are burning. As we arrived on the scene we found a vehicle burning. Next to the car was the charred body of a male. Inside the car the almost burnt out corpse of a female person was lying across the front seats. On the backseat was the burning body of a baby. It seemed to us that everybody in the vehicle, including the baby was shot, as there were a lot of spent cartridges lying on the ground next to the vehicle. This is one scene that will always stay with me. I have never spoken to anyone about this. I have never told my wife about this, and I will not tell her. When my friend from X visits me and we speak about those times we briefly touch on this, and then move on. He understands my feelings about this as he was there. (L)*

The enormity of the catastrophe he witnessed and endured is experienced on a preverbal level; he is unable to talk about it. This also illustrates the police officer's need to keep the destruction away from his loved ones as if they may be tainted by this (Bonifacio, 1991; Parker & Roth, 1973). He is thus isolated from and by his scenes of traumatising and the only person who might begin to understand what all of this means is his buddy. As indicated, the buddy relationship has the power to moderate the danger of anxiety (Modell, 1968), which links to the psychoanalytic notion that emotional attachment is probably the primary protection against feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness (Fairbairn, 1943/1952; McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996).

The politicisation of policing brought the police in direct opposition to a large segment of the community. The police were often regarded as the "enemy" and were therefore often attacked. The effect of this ostracisation by the community is brought into perspective if one considers the unconscious need of officers to be of service to the community. A participant describes his feelings of vulnerability, of being exposed and fear of the communities which he was ordered to protect. It is perceived as far more acceptable to sacrifice one's life for the people you love, but conflict develops

in the inner world when you are ordered to protect people whom you do not like and who are perceived to hate you. Also note the sense of depersonalisation in the next insert, that the police became “targets”, not humans.

*In 1992 we [members of the unit] were staying in Katlehong. There was hostels to the right and left, and houses to the back of the complex. We were moving targets for the hostel dwellers and for the persons living in the houses. The hostel dwellers were all Zulu's and tolerated the SAP members as long as we did not trouble them too much. The people in the houses plainly just did not want the SAP there, and were the ones that attacked us the most. Working at night was extremely perilous, because you could not see beyond the lights of the vehicle. Running into ambushes was common during night time operations. Sitting inside a Caspir made you real happy.*  
(L)

The literature often cites the taking of human life by officers as one of the most difficult situations that an officer may have to face (Stratton, Parker & Snibbe, 1984). Data from the current study indicate otherwise: a participant describes his feelings of combat and the killing of a person.

*Late in 1993 I shot a black male in X. The person came running around a corner with a AK47 assault rifle in his hands, pointing in my direction. I think he did not expect a white policeman on foot in the squatter camp. This gave me the small part of a second to shoot him. He fired a shot after the ones I fired, hit him. Seeing someone lying dying on the ground did not fill me with satisfaction, just realizing that I was alive was satisfaction enough. Then anger and the shock of coming close to death set in. I sat on the ground next to the body and was smoking a cigarette to calm my nerves. Then all hell broke loose. We were in a narrow alley and his comrades started shooting from the one end with policemen returning fire from the other end. We were about seven members that were stuck in the middle. By God's grace only one policeman was injured during the minutes long exchange of fire. I told my girlfriend the next day about what happened and never spoke to her or anyone about the incident again. After*

***1993 I never returned to the East Rand. (L)***

This account vividly demonstrates the similarity between the situations in which members of the South African police find themselves and the state of warfare by military combat personnel. It might be that the perceived demarcation between “us” and “them”, and “good” against “evil” justify killing before being killed. In this excerpt, the fear of being killed outweighs by far the killing of another. The officer further utilised avoidance as defence mechanism.

Another participant expands upon this notion of me (good) against him (evil) in his description of an incident where he shot a perpetrator after he was seriously injured by the same person.

***Then there was the time that I was seriously injured. During a task in a township where there was a standoff with the police, we were called in to sort out a kidnapping turned hostage situation. On penetration, my partner did not protect me properly from his side of the doorway and I was struck on the head with a metal knob-kierie. I remained on the job despite the injury and as justice would probably have it, I ended up shooting the member dead after he stormed out at me a second time, this time with a type of spear/spike. At the time I didn't feel much emotion at all, in any situation as long as the killing or wounding has been in my mind justifiable (the perpetrator threatening another person's life) then I have had no problem doing what is necessary. My injuries were a cracked skull, bleeding inside the cranium and a deep laceration to the forehead needing inner and outer stitching. For a while after that day I had a strong fear when I went on jobs. The only way I knew to deal with it was to confront it as I did with all previous types of fear. I made a point of placing myself first in line on all tactical penetration assaults after that for a long time. The inner trauma/fear was bad though and of course I only spoke of it after the “problem” had gone away (about 6 months) to fellow members who had experienced the same thing. (N)***

The officer calls it “justice” that he killed the one that hurt him. This introduces a

spiritual dimension: the good power is justified to punish evil. The fact that he mentions a lack of protection from his partner might have exasperated his feelings of vulnerability; he cannot depend on his buddy's protection and thus stands alone. These feelings of isolation with no one to trust might have aggravated the effects of the trauma which he experienced. The literature indicates that sustaining a serious injury is regarded as severely traumatic as it shatters a policeman's physical self-concept of being impervious to injury and having control over his environment, which results in a lowering of self-esteem and doubting his abilities. The officer's feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability are shattered by these overwhelmingly painful experiences. This specific officer reacted with severe anger, hatred and almost lost control.

*Through the years I've been shot at numerous times and I feel have had no affect, only euphoria if anything. Some how though after I had been wounded, I also went through a stage where I was in my own eyes becoming dangerous as I could not handle the fact that such violent selfish psychopathic human beings who would simply murder and rape etc at will were being protected by their rights or escaping the system through undisciplined or corrupt state officials. I had this inner hatred and rage and was dangerously close to taking the law into my own hands when confronting these persons. I was a wreck inside and becoming unstable. I has strong urges of vigilantism. I believe it was God who divinely arranged that I took over the administration and logistics of X for about a year thus working operationally much less. (N)*

Anger, aggression and irritability are commonly associated with traumatisation. In the following excerpt, a participant describes his feelings of anger after arresting robbers who shot at them. The anger is directed at the robbers as well at colleagues who were not at the scene but criticise what happened there. Again there is the notion that anyone who was not part of the specific incident, be they other police officers or not, cannot understand what it was like.

*Although, later one regrets it that the robbers are not dead, because they shot to kill us. It was an unfair battle. Some people criticise one's actions*

*afterwards and say that they would have handled it better... Then I think to myself: “do not comment if you were not part of that which happened when it happened”.* (C)

The literature cites feelings of abandonment by the department as a common complaint by injured policemen (Kroes,1985). This is often perceived as a lack of support.

*In 2001 I had a serious motor vehicle accident... During my stay in hospital my unit commander visited me once. There were no visits from colleagues.* (L)

*In none of the above cases did my unit commander refer me to helping professions for counselling or for debriefing after a traumatic event.* (L)

It is important to note here that all off the instances of trauma that were cited in the participants’ essays were discussed in this section. This point is extremely relevant to the study since it alludes to the fact that instances of trauma received much less prominence in participants’ essays than other work-related issues.

### **6.3.1 Police officers’ perception of traumatic incidents**

Notwithstanding the fact that the participants acknowledge these incidents as severely traumatic, not one of the participants feels that he cannot cope with it. This is contradictory to the dominant discourse of the organisation which mainly focuses its intervention on trauma-related instances (as discussed in chapter two). The participants utilise various defence mechanisms, some more effective and psychologically “healthy” than others, but they consider themselves able to cope with the trauma encountered in their working environment. None of the participants focused on trauma *per se* as cause for the difficulties experienced in their working environment.

*Even though one experienced horrific crime scenes that were traumatic, these were overshadowed by a positive sense of reward when making good arrests.* (A)

Apprehending the perpetrators gave meaning to the exposure to horrific crime scenes and experiencing the accompanying trauma. When a sense of meaning can be attributed to these incidents, it seems as if they do not cause trauma *per se*. Rather the frustrations associated with the job of policing is perceived as being traumatic.

***Frustration in the police causes severe trauma in one's life. (C)***

***Today the greatest stress is simply the unfairness of affirmative action and not being provided with the tools to do my work. (N)***

From the essays it is evident that most participants experience the implementation and consequences of what they term “affirmative action” as unfair and unjust<sup>5</sup>. These perceived unfairness and injustices take on a profound meaning when viewed in light of officers’ spiritual need for justice and their siding with the “good” and the “righteous” (as was discussed earlier). The perceived injustices are all the more confusing and troubling since they are enforced by the police fraternity itself. On another level, “not being provided with the tools to do my work” means in a sense that one is “castrated” and emasculated. This leaves officers exposed to “horrific crime scenes” and they are traumatised without having the option of finding meaning by arresting the criminals (to act potently). The trauma endured is thus considered meaningless. Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996) found that the meanings which people attach to traumatic events are as fundamental as the trauma itself.

***Stress and danger are a way of living for each member of the SAPS STF and members cope reasonably well with this trauma. In the last couple of years it seems that members are more susceptible to stress because of traumatic encounters. In the past, there was a high regard and firm belief for the way they were doing their work, there was support from the government, top SAP structure and there was a sense of security. The new SA has seen the STF lose members dramatically (51 members since April 2000). Most left the SAPS because of unhappiness with the new system and lack of recognition and support. (S)***

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<sup>5</sup> The issue of “affirmative action” will be expanded on later in the discussion of racial tension (6.5.1) and representivity (6.5.2).

Again it is stressed that police officers “cope reasonably well” with the trauma associated with being a police officer, namely stress and danger. However, what they do not cope well with are the feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, as well as the lack of recognition and support from the government and police management. These are purely organisational issues rather than psychological traumas which impact on police officers’ mental health. Another participant’s account further highlights this point:

*The one experience that did have a traumatic effect on me though, wasn’t a horrific crime scene. It was when I was falsely accused of assaulting a suspect and charged. This made me lose a lot of faith in our justice system. This led me to believe that, in this country, all a suspect has to do to have all charges dropped against him, is to make accusations that the arresting officer assaulted him. The state will then drop the charges and pursue a charge of assault against the police officer. The case against me dragged on for two years, before I was acquitted. (A)*

The police officer is hurt because of the perceived injustices of the legal system and the lack of backing or support that he experienced.

In contrast to the previous section on traumatic incidents where all relevant inserts were included, only some inserts from the participants’ essays were selected for the next section on organisational stressors and transformation. This was done in an effort to limit repetition. When one compares the extent to which trauma was reported in comparison to the number of difficulties experienced with organisational stressors and transformation, it is obvious from the essays that the latter weighs far heavier on the minds of participants.



## 6.4 Organisational stressors



As discussed in chapter four, the job of policing is internationally associated with various organisational stressors. This also applies to the situation in the South African Police Service. To reiterate, police stress is defined as a perceived imbalance between what is required of officers and what they are capable of giving, under conditions where failure may have dire consequences (McGrath, 1992). Failure to respond to demands in policing is often associated with harm or death. All participants in the current study concurred that organisational stressors have an extremely negative impact on their functioning as police officers, their well-being and their lives as a whole. This is on par with the study conducted in Gauteng (Psychological Services & SAITS, 2001) in which only 10% to 18% of respondents could relate to the objectives of the SAPS. According to Anderson (n.d.), problems regarding police administration are very real for officers and sometimes constitute a second wound.

### 6.4.1 Training

Although individuals are responsible for their own development it is the police organisation's primary responsibility to provide the necessary training to its members in order to equip them to function effectively as police officers. As was mentioned earlier in the discussion of masculinity, training may be viewed on a psychodynamic level as the organisation (or "father") teaching the son how to be a man and providing the tools necessary for manhood. Should this "training" or the "tools" be considered inadequate, it impacts negatively on the officer's perception of himself as a competent and capable man.

The training of police officers has dual relevance to this study. Firstly there is the level of competency that officers themselves experience, and secondly, their perception of their colleagues' level of competency. Both of these impact on the officer's sense of safety and adequacy which in turn is linked to their sense of self. This is one of the areas where inadequacy may have serious consequences; untrained officers are a liability to themselves, their colleagues and the public alike. Training is valued as important by the participants and linked to police officers' confidence, field of expertise and feelings of security. Adequate training makes them feel prepared and equipped for the job at hand.

***Even though the training was physically very demanding, and you worked under lots of pressure, I believe that I am better equipped, and better trained to do every job that is required from me. (L)***

The notion that "I am better equipped, and better trained" again portrays the need to feel special and distinctive.

***The quality of the men I work with and get to train is generally the top elite group in the SAPS who want to do this job. The guys are intelligent, physically strong and fit, able to produce high quality results and have great initiative. (N)***

Lawrence (1978) found that police do not view the danger in the work as a source of stress if they feel equipped to handle it. Accordingly, they regard stress as a function of the degree of control the officer has over the situation: the more control or mastery they have, the less stress they feel. This sense of control is linked to an internal locus of control which is seen as being supportive of mental health. In confirmation of this finding, it is noteworthy that none of the participants in this study who are members of the Special Task Force mention the danger inherent in this line of work.

Some participants feel that the organisation does not provide the proper in-service training. This angers them and perceived the organisation as not caring for them or wanting to keep them safe.

***We are supposed to go on a three day refresher course every three months. I am nearly seven years at X and was, if I remember correctly, only three***

*times on such a course. There are always excuses. The training is important to us ... your life depends on it. We are suppose to have a station shooting exercise every month, if I remember correctly. I think I attended one such a shooting exercise during my whole career in the police.*(B)

*This (being promoted to the rank of officer) scared me because I've never received any formal training in managing people. Having to make decisions on behalf of others is a tough task and not something I was prepared for. It would have been much easier and would have given me a lot more confidence if I had been sent on a course, which prepares you to move from a non-commissioned officer to an officer. (J)*

The second relevant aspect of training is found in officers' perception of their colleague's level of competency. Working with untrained or poorly trained colleagues makes officers feel extremely vulnerable, as if they are unprotected and unsafe. This obviously creates a tremendous amount of anger and anxiety. Participants experience working with untrained colleagues as dangerous and stressful.

*There were members on the course who did not even know how to use his firearm. We are suppose to be an elite unit ... you are suppose to be familiar with your firearm how else can you work outside. No wonder so many police officials are shot dead on the streets. (B)*

*Just the other day Inspector X, had to make Sargent Y's R5-rifle safe because she did not know how to do it. (M)*

*Members are highly stressed about the fact that poorly trained and incompetent ladies will join their ranks on who they must depend with their lives. This could have serious and fatal consequences resulting in the death of either hostages or members themselves. (S)*

This is an important fact and needs to be reflected upon in light of the buddy relationship as well as the brotherhood relationship. The participants in these excerpts suggest that they cannot be expected to face the enemy while anticipating that their partner may shoot them inadvertently in the back. The apprehension of being

partnered with a female officer is also expressed in these inserts and will be discussed later in the section.

#### **6.4.2 Support and recognition**

As was discussed earlier, the job of policing is often associated with the added impact of leaving officers feeling exposed, vulnerable, without backing and “left out to dry”. To feel supported and recognised is an important alleviate to the feelings of vulnerability and acts as a “trauma membrane” (Lindy & Titchener, 1983). In addition, the psychodynamic perspective on policing considers promotion, commendations and higher salaries as emotionally important since they symbolise the department’s approval or recognition of officers by rewarding them for being “special”. Participants cite the low salary that they earn as proof that they are not valued for the work they do and the risks they take. This is again in accordance with the study (Psychological Services & SAITS, 2001) in which 79% to 84% of the participants indicated that they are not paid enough for what they do.

*We are a specialising unit and not treated as that. The allowance that was meant for us is taken away. Five years has past since we were promised to receive an allowance and yet nothing has happened thus far. This makes members to leave our unit and join the private sector where the money is good.* (F)

The message implied by this officer is: “I’m not treated as special but am rather devalued and deceived”.

*Superiors seem not to appreciate the commitment, dedication and expertise of these highly trained specialists. Members of the SAPS Special Task Force earn exactly the same salaries as ordinary police officers of the same rank and receive no danger allowance or special skills allowance.* (S)

*The STF is paid the same measly salary as any other police officer in blues. Thus forcing the highly skilled operator to seek employment elsewhere, cause loyalty doesn’t put bread on the table. Companies out there are willing to pay the salary that a STF member is worth.* (G)

In other words, other companies acknowledge that these officers are special and worth investing money in. This topic brings police salaries into scope. There are periodically outcries in the media over the substandard police salaries<sup>6</sup> (e.g. Meyer & Kühne, 2003). Earlier this year four police officers were shot dead on a Sunday morning, allegedly while performing duties as security guards at a warehouse in Johannesburg. Various discussions followed in the media about police officers having second (and third) jobs and promises were made publically that the matter would receive serious attention. The only reaction to date is that all police officers who perform remunerative work outside the SAPS are investigated. It is my experience that most (if not all) police officers who take on an extra job do so because they struggle to cope financially and that they resent the time spent away from home. Other than the effect on the time needed to rest, relax and unwind, a second job places extra strain on marital and family relationships.

*I have used much of my own money and family time for the STF without any remuneration. If I had not done this the work would not get done. I receive no recognition or remuneration and my family suffers big time because of my loyalty towards my work. My wife occasionally pleads with me for a divorce, and the funny thing is that we don't fight that much personally, it's always about my work or the lack of finances which causes stress. This I see as my children start to grow up and self esteem becomes evident. I'm the provider and have been offered opportunities to make large sums of money but again stick with the SAPS because I want to make a difference. (N)*

Earning a salary is directly linked to being the “provider” and thus worthy as a man, which impacts on self-esteem. Low salaries are frankly associated with a lack of recognition for their worth as well as inadequate remuneration for the type of work done.

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<sup>6</sup> Substandard in comparison to the Metro Police and the “Scorpions”, for example.

The low salaries are further related to the lack of promotion opportunities by the participants. This is in accordance with studies that indicate that officers express hostility toward their departments for what they perceive as a lack of a genuine opportunity for promotion (Fagan & Ayers, 1982; Lefkowitz, 1973; Preiss & Ehrlich, 1966; Reiser, 1973).

*There are no promotions from non commissioned officer to officer, the reason given that there are no posts. That is not a problem, however, we just need the money (and not the post). Some non commissioned officers are doing officers' work and get no (monetary) recognition thereof. (F)*

The reference to financial need and not being recognised as worthy and skilled is clear.

Participants express despair and helplessness. The message seems to be: "I did everything that was expected of me (and even more), yet I'm stuck in the same position".

*As constable in the SAPS I was encouraged by my managers to study and to achieve a National Diploma in Police Administration because it would count points towards my career and possible promotions. I wasted my time and money. I obtained my National Diploma in 1996 and in 2003, 8 years later am I still an Inspector and will probably remain one. It is not so easy for someone who worked almost two decades at a certain firm, to look for other work. I feel let down by the police in this regard. What makes matters worse is the fact that I earn exactly the same salary as a "blougat" inspector, even though I have seven years more experience in policing than him<sup>7</sup>. Do we really mean this little to the factory that we work for? If they don't want to promote us, they can at least give us two or three notch increases to make us feel as if we have also achieved something in life. And worst of all, that "blougat" Inspector does not even have a National Diploma! (M)*

The officer associates self-worth with the money which he earn. The sense of total despair, hopelessness and depersonalisation comes through in the outcry: "Do we

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<sup>7</sup> Salaries in the SAPS are generally linked to rank and position.

really mean this little to the factory that we work for?”

Participants commonly reflect the sense that they do not experience adequate support or recognition from the organisation and cite this as reason for leaving the organisation.

*The rest left the SAPS because of unhappiness with the new system and lack of recognition and support. (S)*

*Through the years members have come and gone and most of the time they left because of a better paying job. (P)*

*The loss of good police members to the private sector where there is more cognizance of their efforts and they are afforded more dignity. (R)*

Police officers are afforded dignity if they can adequately provide for their family. This is linked to police officers’ belief that their role is society is paternal (Beijen, 1995) and that they must take care of others, especially their family.

#### **6.4.3 Perceptions about commanders and management of the SAPS**

Commanders and management are seen as the personification of the “organisation” and often as the people in power who make the decisions. According to the psychodynamic viewpoint, a policeman’s unconscious emotional experience is that he is the child and the department is either a powerful, nurturing parent or a bungling, punishing one (Reiser, 1982).

*We heard later that X<sup>8</sup> is leaving on medical grounds. The founder and “godfather” of the unit doesn’t want to be part of this circus any longer. (M)*

The term “godfather” carries an tremendous amount of power and awe as opposed to the derogatory reference to “circus”. The implied question in this statement is: “What will happen to me since the (my) godfather has left but I’m still part of the circus?”

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X refers in this case to a specific person whose identity is protected.

The role of parent or “father” is often alluded to, with the implication that a father is supposed to place his child’s needs above his own.

*It often feels as if our officers does not support us when there are problems and they are selfishly looking after themselves. What kind of officer places his own needs above those of the members under his command? (B)*

The person, competency and attitude of the commander is considered extremely important by participants in establishing a positive working environment.

*Highway Patrol was established in 1996 under the command of X. I respect this officer. I think he is an exceptional police official, a strong leader and a perfectionist in his work. Unfortunately he was stationed in Y (another town) and he was also the commander of two other units. Thus he was too busy to make contact with us or get to know the people in his units. (M)*

Reference is made in this insert to the cumbersome organisational structure discussed in chapter two. Another factor which is alluded to is the lack of power and helplessness of commanders and management alike. This, however, is not consciously acknowledged by the participants.

In agreement with the literature, the participants cite various examples of the organisation’s “ineptitude and its willingness to abandon them to the press, the public, and the politicians to protect itself” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.55):

*We were threatened with Departmental persecution if you were not on the highway. Even if we were to respond to complaints such as armed robbery and housebreaking in progress, the same rule applied. This caused an incredible amount of tension because the members did not understand the purpose in this. We heard that the instruction were given directly by the National Commissioner. We got the feeling that our commanders did not want to stand up (protect) us because they were scared that they were going to be penalized by doing so. At that stage Resolution 7 still threatened the*



*future of police officials<sup>9</sup>. Within two months two members of HP resigned. The biggest joke of all was when we were reprimanded for not showing successes! How can they expect from us to make arrests by sitting static on a highway?* (M)

Participants feel powerless to query instructions and commands which do not make sense to them, and even question the credibility of management.

*This instruction shocked me. How can anyone who says he is serious about reducing the crime in this country, issue an instruction like that? Was this man involved in crime himself and was he trying to get us out of the way?* (A)

*It makes one wonder what the hell is happening in the police. What happened to the government's promise to fight crime? How much corruption are there really?* (C)

The idea that commanders are inept and punitive is visible in most participants' narratives. They mention a lack of respect for their commanders and say that they do not trust them.

*The integrity of Senior officers is under suspicion. They cannot be trusted and will change their decisions to cover themselves even at the cost of loyal members. They are afraid to make decisions.* (E)

*Captain X came from the shifts and is someone who left the Service twice and crawled back with his tail between his legs because he couldn't make it outside. What does the Police think if they re-employ a runaway-come-back and appoint him in a position above me. He further occupies an officer's post which I might have had... One can simply not trust the commanders. They never listen to you, nothing you say is regarded as confidential and participatory management does not exist anymore.* (M)

Noteworthy in this last insert is the total disregard for someone who left the police

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<sup>9</sup> This statement alludes to the perception that Resolution 7 was implemented to penalise members.

fraternity and returned due to his perceived incompetence and inability to survive outside of the police service.

Commands and instructions that do not make sense to participants cause frustration, boredom, conflict, anger and severe feelings of helplessness. When people cannot make sense of what they are supposed to be doing, their function becomes meaningless.

*I sometimes get frustrated that the cases we do investigate at the unit has no impact on crime or preventing corruption within the service. We spend forever gathering information on various subjects, compile reports and memorandums but nothing comes of it.*(H)

*Then came the biggest, ridiculous, stupidest decision ever, from commissioners none the less. Highway Patrol must stay static under a bridge on the highway for the whole shift to be visible. This would supposedly bring a decrease in crime. Preposterous!!! Crime increase. Hijacking escalates because there is no visible policing in the suburbs. Where have you ever heard of hijacking happening on a highway? Not even on the TV or in movies does this happen. You are sitting static for 8 hours while you hear on the radio how robberies are taking place and there is no one that can attend to them. Once it took 40 minutes to attend to a complaint of a hijacking. This complaint came through on the radio as being in progress to a Highway patrol vehicle that was 2 minutes from the scene ... but the instruction was clear; Highway Patrol may not respond to complaints. You are visited at your post, treated like a child and accused if not found at your post.* (C)

Connected to the meaningless of the job is the police officer's own sense of worthlessness and powerlessness. Participants feel as if they are not able or competent men, but mere children.

*Members are treated like schoolchildren and not responsible adults.* (R)

*I may talk or complain about it but no one listens to a member on ground-level.* (M)

The police officer's impotence leaves him without power, without a voice. In psychodynamic terms, the policeman's feelings of powerlessness and of being trapped in meaningless suffering are terrible blows because they constitute his failure to live up to the expectations of his ego ideal, his masculinity. This situation further elevates a sense of an external locus of control.

Participants mention as additional stressors organisational red-tape, a lack of logistical support which places their lives in danger, and the unfair allocation of resources. This is mostly attributed to the clumsy organisational structure and incompetent or uncaring commanders.

*It may sometimes take up to two months to get approval to have our vehicles serviced. It also happened a few times that quotes that were handed in for approval disappeared between X<sup>10</sup> and Y. Our vehicles are but a few and it is becoming less and then our commander and second-in-charge each drive one (what they use the vehicles for no one knows and neither of them passed the advanced driving course). It was said in the beginning that only members who passed the course my drive the vehicles. It seems as if that does not count any more. The point is this; there are a deficit of vehicles to do the work and officers drive around in them. (B)*

*Vehicles that we use are not suitable for the type of work we do. We often wait a long period before we receive new vehicles and upon receiving they are unserviceable. (F)*

*Our vehicles are old, worn-out and often not roadworthy and is life threatening for us as drivers and passengers. (M)*

*Leave us in a stable working environment in order for us to do our job. A positive employee gets results. Why does no one care for us? (B)*

Working in a dangerous and exposed environment creates immense feelings of vulnerability and anxiety which necessitate support and protection. The

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<sup>10</sup> X and Y again refer to different towns and are used to protect the identities of participants.

psychodynamic perspective suggest that police officers' wish for power and recognition to exist simultaneously with dependent wishes for protection and security from the organisation. Perceived lack of support or caring from the organisation may therefore impact negatively on a police officer's job satisfaction, mental well-being and may also exacerbate the effects of traumatisation.

#### **6.4.4 The impact of organisational stressors on relationships**

Relationships within the police service can broadly be grouped into three clusters, namely relationships with colleagues, relationships with friends outside of the police service and family relationships. Relationships with co-workers are considered important and have a highly supportive function, as discussed earlier. The literature indicates that police officers rarely socialise with non-police officers, which leaves family relations as the only other area of social support.

*During this period, I relied heavily on my wife for support. Whenever something bothers me, I usually talks about it to my wife. Even though I feel it's good for me to talk about it, I think it might have a negative effect on her. (A)*

There is almost unanimous agreement in the literature (as discussed in chapter four) that the job of policing imposes considerable stress on the family unit (Parker & Roth, 1973; Scaturo & Hayman, 1992).

*How do you handle trauma at your workplace? Well you go home, shout, swear and scream at your family? I have done it and are ashamed of it. (P)*

These two inserts indicate some sense of guilt engrossed in family relationships, either for relying to heavily on their support or by using them to ventilate negative emotions.

*These two boys, together with my daughter, are the highlight of everyday. After a difficult day at work they help me to relax and wind down with the things they are doing. I started coaching them in "bulletjie" rugby. This exercise takes my mind of things troubling me at work. I do not tell my wife everything that is happening at work, as she has her own job and I do not want to saddle her with SAPS politics. Having been married for 9 years*

***helps to relieve the stress that comes with being a member of the SAPS. Having been blessed with an unexpected fourth child this year makes life worth living to the fullest. When I am off duty all my love and attention goes to my wife and children. Beware the person trying to harm anyone of them.***(L)

This insert highlights the police officer's concern with his family's physical safety. The defensive stance towards life activities can become an obsession and a liability for officers (Gilmartin, 1986; Skolnick, 1966; Williams, 1987). With this need to protect them goes a strong sense of obligation to secure their safety, and feelings of guilt may occur when his working hours interfere with being home with his family. 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 void 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 distancing between marriage partners and a general lack of understanding and communication

The psychodynamic stance that the role of husband might sometimes be far less gratifying than that of police officer is illustrated by the next insert.

***The level of the high is sometimes so addictive that you sometimes find when you wake up in your comfy bed, surrounded by your family that you have once again left certain things undone, or only got through it halfway due to the strong need not to be late for another once in a lifetime job, that you know you and your mates will talk about for years to come... I have been with this unit for ten years and will not change or replace it with anything else. It seems that working in this kind of environment you are exposed to ups and downs every minute of the day. That's just how it is.*** (J)

Other than the exposure to trauma and the allure of police work, participants cite their working hours as impacting negatively on relationships.

***We arrived home late ... and it started to slowly eat away at my marriage. My wife never knew what time I'd be back and she didn't care anymore.***  
(B)

*We were at home infrequently. One could never plan in advance to spend time with your family because we were informed when we worked on short notice. There were no set hours. It seemed as if the person who determined our working hours didn't consider it necessary to let us know beforehand. We felt like mechanical men. It was so bad at one stage that we were informed on a daily basis which hours we would work the next day. (B)*

*Sometimes we performed shift duties, then flexible hours, then operations, then office hours and whatever times that suited them [management]. These disruptive work circumstances were not conducive for my home life. (M)*

*In most cases you spend more time far from home and there is no good communication with your family and relatives. (K)*

Organisational stressors are experienced by participants as having a far greater negative impact on their functioning in their home environments than traumatic incidents.

*... but I feel that it [instructions that were seen as opposing the task of fighting crime] has had such a huge impact on my life, that it overshadows other events that might be seen as traumatic. It has effected my personal life in such a way that I sometimes grew impatient towards my wife and daughter. I'm very concerned about this, because that sort of behaviour is out of character for me. (A)*

The literature indicates that if a person cannot ascribe some sense of meaning to the hardships endured, he or she becomes more vulnerable to experiencing post-traumatic symptoms (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). From the data there seems to emerge an amount of guilt on the part of the police officer in relation to family relationships. However, Chandler's (1990) caution against the labelling of police families as dysfunctional needs to be heeded, since only one of the fifteen participants is in a second marriage and two are single. These statistics obviously offer no information as to the happiness or degree of satisfaction of the husband-wife relationship; however, it does suggest a degree of stability.

#### 6.4.5 Coping skills

As was discussed previously, police officers who perceive their working environment as uncontrollable (external locus of control) are more likely utilising emotion-focused coping, which is associated with a poorer prognosis for their mental well-being. Alcohol abuse is often part of a police officer's efforts to cope. The abuse of alcohol among policemen is reported to be widespread (Dietrich & Smith, 1986; Hurrell & Kroes, 1975).

*The trauma caused by all these incidents and situations have led to excessive drinking. At one stage I was drinking daily and getting drunk most days. I come to realise that I must set an example for my kids and that the situation I was in was not anybody's fault. I think the realisation that the way things are going is a normal reaction of any person or persons that have been oppressed, woke me up. I still have a few "toasts" but do not get drunk any more... I spent time with my wife and children and I spent more time with my Maker. I try to go to church more often. I got involved with school activities ... I think that when I started to realise that there is life outside of my working hours, and that I am not responsible for everybody, I became less stressed and traumatised. (E)*

This insert indicates ways in which defence mechanisms such as rationalisation may contribute to restore a sense of control over a situation, which encourages more adaptive ways of functioning. The shift away from the working environment to activities and people who are considered important further contributed to this participant's coping. The conscious increase of distance from the working environment is perceived as an act of survival. The implied message is that the working environment is killing that part of him which is "good" and "decent".

*Over weekends and holidays I have a ritual of taking off my watch and just live. I try to be calm and friendly. I try to see the beauty around me and to lead by example. The truth of some or other wise guy stayed with me: "Life is not fair - get used to it". (E)*

*I have found that the friction at the office gets carried over to your home environment and has an influence on it. I make a conscious effort to leave*

***my work and work frustrations at work.*** (H)

This might even be seen as a split between the working persona and the non-working persona. Again there is the example of rationalisation as a defence at play: "Life is not fair - get used to it".

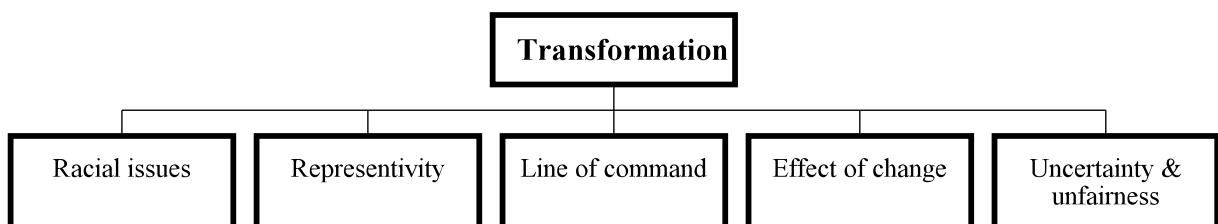
The previous insert alluded to spirituality as a meaningful form of coping and some participants mention religious beliefs as coping mechanisms in traumatic situations.

***My colleague and I and our vehicle were not even hit, while we literally didn't stand a chance against them. It comforts one to know that God protected us. It was His will that we were safe in that situation.*** (C)

If we reflect on the amount of data provided on coping in the essays, the scariness of the situations to which the police officers are exposed becomes starkly apparent.

Many of the organisational stressors that are discussed in the data are associated with the process of change in the SAPS. As was discussed in chapter two, political transformation seems to be particularly dominant in influencing police officers' mental health. This is exacerbated by the notion that many police officers are unable to deal with emotional and/or psychological ambiguity (Nel & Steyn, 1997). These stressors are unique to the current situation in South Africa and contribute to the difficulties involved in the job of policing.

## 6.5 Transformation





According to a SAPS psychologist, officers face two major stresses: the inherent problems of an often dangerous, violent and underappreciated job, and the pressure of working in an organisation which is being fundamentally transformed (Schmidt, 1995). Stressors experienced by members of the SAPS therefore range from the constant exposure to death and disaster to working in a changing organisation characterised by low police morale, poor remuneration, resignations, tensions between police and political leadership and uncertainty both within and outside the police (Kopel, 1996).

### **6.5.1 Racial tension**

Goldman (2003) claims that, other than its common interest in suppressing women, White and Black masculinity in South Africa only met to struggle for dominance. Historically the police force was dominated by white males, and as discussed in chapter two, the transformation of the SAPS focused on bringing about race and gender equality. White males are thus the group most affected by the implementation of affirmative action policies, and the once in-group currently find themselves in an alienated position. The position of estrangement and of occupying the “outsider” position holds various implications for mental well-being. This position needs to be considered in relation to the traumatising work environment as well as the loss of a supportive subgroup, which leaves the White, male police officer in an extremely vulnerable position. Merbaum (1977) found that an unaccepting social environment can increase a soldier’s vulnerability to post-traumatic stress. In addition, Fox (1974) sees the loss of group cohesion as a major contributor to the development of PTSD.

Racial tension is a sensitive topic and probably the issue in the SAPS which is least acknowledged on an official level. For various reasons, including our colonial and apartheid history, racial issues in South Africa and the SAPS in particular are imbued with fear, guilty, anger and anxiety. In their relationship with one another Black and White men have not only been divided by history and geography; they have been related to one another in particular and hierarchical ways (Goldman, 2003). Morrel (2001) argues that whereas the history of White supremacy would suggest that White,

ruling class masculinity was hegemonic, this is not completely accurate as it fails to capture “the stubborn reality of African life” (p.18).

Since the inception of the “new” (anti-apartheid) South Africa and the revamped SAPS, racism, or the perceived unfair advantage of one racial group over another, is considered to be a serious organisational stressor by the White, male participants.

*Apparently racism does not exist in the new South Africa. ‘Ha-ha!’ racism is alive and well and the only thing that’s still advancing in the SAPS and its coming from both sides. Both my previous and present direct commanders are two of the biggest racists that I ever encountered in the SAPS. It causes tension between members when some ethnic groups are deliberately favoured above others. This is one of the main reasons of conflict between black and white members at HP. It is wrong for someone in a managerial position to be guilty of such serious misconduct. (M)*

This insert refers to the official acknowledgement of racism as a “serious misconduct” since 1994.

Various essays commented on the practice of doing things “just for the show” or “showcasing”, referring to the selection of police officers for certain positions, functions, training and so on for reasons of representivity rather than on merit<sup>11</sup>. Much of the anger and resentment directed at this practice is found in the implied message that “looking politically correct” (i.e. having the correct ratio of Whites, Blacks, Coloureds and Indians, having the correct ratio of men to women, as well as having disabled persons in any grouping<sup>12</sup>) is valued above “doing good” (achieving the set goal).

*Unfair sending of the same members on training interventions locally as well as internationally, to show representivity. There are only, at the time*

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<sup>11</sup> Although this statement might be contested, it reflects the viewpoint of most participants.

<sup>12</sup> The Equity Act prescribes race and gender equality in the workplace.

*of writing, about 10 members of colour on the STF and about 50 white<sup>13</sup>. The same “black” members continuously get sent on training interventions to show the representivity of the races on the training intervention. They are mostly young members on the unit who would not be considered if they were white, due to not enough experience to represent the STF effectively.* (N)

Participants consider promotions based on race rather than competence and experience to be unfair. They feel it impedes on service delivery and the effective functioning of the unit and organisation as a whole.

*I am frustrated because of the affirmative action promotions of members who would not normally have come close to qualifying for a post.* (N)

*At this stage I have reached a point where I have realised that I have no future as a white male in the Police: Promotions at this level for white males are few and far between<sup>14</sup>. The attitude that black officers must be given posts and promotion not because they are the best candidates or capable - but because they are black - is going to have devastating consequences.* (E)

*In general I am happy being a member of the SAPS (even if it means no promotion because of political reasons), that being one of the most frustrating avenues of the service as there is nothing we can do about it if people are appointed in positions because of their skin colour and not because of their capabilities. I try very hard to not let this get me down, but it is very difficult as one feels helpless that you do not really have the prospect of getting promoted and bettering yourself.* (H)

The sense of helplessness, despair and an external locus of control is noticeable. It is

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<sup>13</sup> In the past there was only one selection and training course for males of all race groups and a set standard had to be met before they could join the STF. Black males historically experienced difficulties with regard to some aspects of the selection, e.g. swimming.

<sup>14</sup> Posts and positions are reserved for designated races and genders. White males are considered as a non-designated group and may only apply for a limited number of posts.

further insinuated that *no* black officer is appointed in a post because of competence or merit, which is obviously not the case. However, the perceptions and attitudes associated with this opinion negatively affect racial relationships as well as collegial support and functioning<sup>15</sup>.

*The actual capabilities of police members promoted to senior posts are not up to the standard expected in a long way. It is obvious that some of these members were not promoted to offer their knowledge and do a job, but merely to “fill a gap”. (R)*

*The “policymakers” regard these facts as trivial or the investigation implicates high ranking members who have been appointed because of political reasons. (H)*

*I have reached a decision just to do what is expected , not to do more and not to do less. In the beginning when the changes dawned upon me I was angry and abusive. I tried to undermine the black officers. I have come to grips with it and know that my petty attitude is only harming myself. I have therefore changed my attitude to one of being content with my situation. I have realised that the responsibility of each post or level goes to the person that has been appointed in that post. I have changed my management strategy and I leave the responsibility as well as accountability with the senior member, who cannot hide behind others anymore. If you are the senior member, you take the responsibility - you are receiving the pay. (E)*

Racial issues are also associated with distrust and sometimes even hatred between members because they belonged to opposing sides in the past.

*I was working in the old Bophuthatswana when the government was toppled. We arrived in Mafikeng the day after the three males from the*

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<sup>15</sup> Competent Black officers often voice their frustration with this practice in psychotherapy. The perception is often that they attained a certain position because of equity standards and because their White counterparts could not apply. This casts a shadow over their competence.

*AWB was executed. There was not a good relationship between the BOP police and the SAP, and several times there was shooting incidents between police members from the two countries. Now those members are part of the SAPS. (L)*

*We used to be a very small group of people but have gotten a lot of new people from the amalgamation of X, this has caused a lot of friction between all the relevant members at the office. (H)*

Participants mentions that discipline and respect for rank are influenced by racial and political issues.

*When disciplinary action is taken by a white officer against a black officer, nothing will happen in most cases; and the white officer be ridiculed by both Senior as well as junior black members. (E)*

One effect of the racial tension is a decaying of the “brotherhood”. The psychodynamic perspective on the loss of the police fraternity is that it has negative consequences for the police officer’s sense of belonging, self-worth, sense of security and safety and of having “backup” in the street.

*This creates an air of mistrust amongst the members who in essence have to work together and trust one another. (H)*

When an officer is (or feels) no longer part of this interpersonal web of protection, it is as if he has lost an integral part of his personality (Violanti, 1992).

*After a dangerous mission in the past, members used to get together in the canteen on site at the unit to socialize and thereby relieve their stress by talking about the mission and have quite a few drinks. A lot of stress and problems were “resolved”. This used to be normal procedure and it seems to have worked quite well. Nowadays members have to be coerced to gather socially to talk openly about traumatic experiences. Lately members have been formally debriefed by counsellors. This practice is despised by the members of this particular unit because of the timing and method applied.*

(S)

The brotherhood or unit was considered to be highly supportive and was trusted to contain members' anxieties. This is in concordance with findings in the literature which indicate that social interactions with supportive groups is important after a traumatic event to reduce psychological symptomatology ( Lin,1982, 1983; Lin et al.,1985; Lindy & Titchener, 1981). The disintegration of the camaraderie was accompanied by the invasion of outsiders (counsellors), and counselling is a practice which is looked upon with contempt by the members. The loss of the brotherhood and its supportive and containing functions is considered as a serious loss in psychodynamic terms. The unit's ability to contain and resolve members' difficulties speaks to masculine power and the loss thereof is despised. This is linked to the officers' perception of their role in society as paternal (Beijen, 1995).

There are many professions in which rivalry and hostility are quite obvious, although Bonifacio (1991) believes that no other profession but policing shows very intense feelings of camaraderie, loyalty, friendship and elitism mixed with strong feelings of anger and a kind of "every man for himself" struggle for advancement. When racial tension and hatred is added to this picture, a complex, unstable and volatile situation (organisation) evolves.

### **6.5.2 Representivity**

As part of the transformation process in the SAPS, an objective is that the personnel compilation reflects the country's demographics with regard to race and gender. The Employment Equity Act (Act no 55 of 1998) aims to ensure that suitable people from designated groups are equally represented in all occupational levels and categories. This is experienced as discrimination and a lowering of standards by the White male participants.

At units where selection and training were highly valued in the past, any lowering in selection standards or prerequisites (in order to accommodate certain race or gender groups) is seen to devalue the elite unit, nullify the hardships that current members endured in order to become part of the unit, and create a more hazardous and

dangerous working environment. It is important to remember from the previous discussions that the perceived degradation of a unit impacts directly on the self-worth of the individual members. This is experienced as extremely negative by participants.

*I have to help prepare a selection and training course for black males only. This with a year of preparation work for them to get them ready to pass a process which the white males are expected to arrive and do. The whole course will however only be for black males and we will teach at their pace, all in order to get the representivity of the unit right. What takes preference - the politically correct ratio of colours or maintaining a standard which allows the proven few to deal with situations which normal policemen cannot handle due to the danger or sophistication of the equipment and application of the training. (N)*

*When it came to the selection of new HP members, the emphasis shifted from high standard to “representativity”. A lot of members left the unit for other units in the SAPS or better jobs in the private sector. Unfortunately, members who were selected because of their race and not their expertise replaced these members. This obviously created a lot of distrust and conflict within the unit. I just didn’t feel confident working with a member who didn’t have the same level of training than we did. As time went by, the unit went into a downward spiral. (A)*

*New members arrived. It was said that our unit is too white. No problem with that. The problem started though with the fact that certain standards were set that one had to meet before working at HP, but it didn’t apply to the new members .... So there was a lowering in the standard that was set and that also lowered the standard of the unit ... If a member deserve to be part of the unit, then I will give my life to him. But I am not prepared to die for those who are tokens and do not deserve to be there. (B)*

A serious stressor for police officers is hostility between brother officers and the feeling that the fraternity itself is a deception (Bonifacio, 1991).

Out of the 362 (male) members that were selected for Special Task Force training in 2003, only ten completed the training process successfully (De Beer, 2003).

Participants experience the political correctness of including female operators in the STF extremely negatively as they feel this results in a severe lowering of standards<sup>16</sup>. Only ten men were able to successfully complete the gruelling training process in 2003, but management has stipulated that 25 women must complete it in 2004. This implies the underrating of one gender in favour of another, and results in animosity. This could also be viewed as the emasculation of this highly masculine unit.

*The same pressure is on to get women onto the unit. A course for them has to be developed etc. They will be given the same status as their successful male counterparts but will do only half the training. All in the name of representivity and political correctness. Why do women athletes compete separately in sport - because they are not physically able to compete with the men. So why in a unit where a lot of the work is physically demanding even for men, do politicians require women in order to show representivity. When I mentioned my concerns to management the answer was: "The equity law overrides all those standards". I've just returned from the STF wing parade where Comm. Selebi has just said he wants to see 25 women STF operators next parade - obviously there is a misconception of what we do and how much physical training there is to achieve this status. (N)*

*The latest traumatic experience for the SAPS Special Task Force members is the political decision that females join the unit as fully operational members... despite the proof that no other special force female operators have made it into any such unit around the world. A training programme for women was planned and presented to operational members which specifies strict passing standards. When the women started the training, none of these standards were enforced and the training was a farce. (S)*

Because members of the STF are highly dependent on one another for their safety, an untrained or poorly trained member becomes a danger to the safety of the others.

*If the STF-training programme is changed, the standard may drop and the credibility of the unit will then be lost. In this unit, it matters not whether*

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<sup>16</sup> This opinion is shared by white and black participants alike.



*a person is Black, White, Indian or Coloured, we at STF treat everybody the same and no favours are made for anyone. Senior officials outside the STF may induce the strategy, however, it will not work. If a person has been condoned to finish the course s/he puts the lives of other members in danger. Such a person becomes a threat to both the members and the public.*(F)

*Members are highly stressed about the fact that poorly trained and incompetent ladies will join their ranks on who they must depend with their lives. This could have serious and fatal consequences resulting in the death of either hostages or members themselves.* (S)

*Since the training of females commenced, two members (both instructors) left the SAPS. A further 8 members have indicated that they are investigating new careers because of the fact that standards are not upheld and that they have been deceived and brought under a false impression that the female members would comply to the same standards as any of the existing operational members. Clearly this latest event is one of the most traumatic and controversial in the history of the STF. The standards have always been kept high and have earned the STF international recognition in world wide special force circles. Members aren't coping well with this trauma and only time will tell what the outcome of the event will be.* (S)

### **6.5.3 Unclear line of command/ cumbersome organisational structure**

Another change in the SAPS that is associated with the transformation of the organisation is an unclear line of command or a cumbersome organisational structure. As discussed in chapter two, the organisation became “top-heavy” with numerous commanders. Participants experience the command structure as cumbersome, clumsy and uncontained in a managerial sense.

*I don't really know how it happened but suddenly our unit commander had less of a say in our duties. Other officers at Area and Provincial level decided what we had to do.* (C)

*My frustration started when I did not know who my commander was... What frustrates all the members a lot was when you ask who gave the order, the only answer you get is: “It is an instruction from above”. When we asked for a meeting with the person who issued the instruction, the answer was always that he’s too busy.*(D)

Not knowing who to report to or whom to take orders from further implies that the members have no one to look out for them, which encourages a state of uncertainty and insecurity. The blurring of the lines of authority cause significantly more stress than a too-rigid line of authority (Chandler, 1990). Participants experience this lack of structure and role clarity as severely frustrating. As indicated by the following excerpts, this creates an identity crisis.

*We were shunted around so much that we were referred to as: “Die Rondfok Squad” [The Fucked-around Squad]. We started to lose our identity. We received so many instructions from various directions that it confused us to such an extent that we didn’t know to which unit we belonged any more or for whom we actually worked . Who are we, what is our purpose and who are our commanders?* (B)

*I used to like this unit. As I feel now I feel like being chased from the unit, I do not enjoy anything any more. I will be very much happy if they can transfer me to another unit or a station where I will be able to know who is in charge of me and where to go when I want to address a problem concerning the job.* (D)

*The person with the loudest voice gives the commands and no one takes care of our needs. X receives the instructions from National or the Provincial Office and channels it through to us, or Area X send instructions to our office, but someone is always stepping on somebody else’s toes to get to us. We jokingly refer to ourselves as the “prostitutes” in the police, because everybody wants to use us and then abuse us.* (M)

These feelings of being violated and exploited are joked about, although the humour seems indicative of the cynicism which often form part of police officers’ make-up.

***Who is our commander? Where is our office? Who give our instructions and who looks after our needs? (M)***

The identity crisis is vividly illustrated by this insert and the heartfelt question: who are we? And in essence: *Who am I?*

#### **6.5.4 The effect of the change**

All participants experienced the recent changes in the organisation as negative. In contrast to the sense of meaning and purpose that was associated with the job of policing in the past, participants currently question the meaning of their function. This finding supports the results of the study (Psychological Services & SAITS, 2001) in which only 1% to 9% of participants felt they made an important contribution to society through their work.

***We were being used more and more as a show-unit and not what we were trained for (combatting of serious crime). We were not allowed to respond to any complaints or crime in progress, even if we were in the immediate vicinity. This was very frustrating and demoralising for all of us. Crime was rife in X, but we had to drive behind a bus....or stand at stationary points on the highways. This instruction shocked me. How could anyone who says that he is serious about reducing crime in this country, issue an instruction like that? Was this man involved in crime himself and was he trying to get us out of the way? All these questions were going through my head as I was trying to make sense of this. We actually worked these insane duties for nine months. During this period I could hear crimes in progress being broadcast and the operator battling to find vehicles to respond to these complaints, but we were not allowed to respond. The crime rate escalated. Instead of putting our unit to the use it was intended for, new units were started with new vehicles. Do the SAPS have too much money or is it managed by a bunch of morons? (A)***

From this insert it is clear how an external locus of control is encouraged when some “higher authority” is experienced as having all the power. Other than the powerlessness and helplessness this causes, the officer’s ability to act potently is

restricted. An immediate reaction to lack of ability-utilisation is job dissatisfaction (O'Brien, 1995).

*And then certainly one of the worst things happened that we still do not comprehend, up to today. Our elite unit had to sit under bridges on the highway to be visible. Frustration does not even begin to describe the feeling. It was terrible to hear crime being committed in the vicinity and you can do nothing about it, you may not help. (B)*

The sense of emasculation leads to impotence which again impacts on self-worth. The feeling that “everything is just for show” and devoid of meaning is echoed by another participant.

*This year we had this very visible special operation in X. Over a thousand police officers partook in this huge operation to combat crime, a noble idea. But because of “high brass” wanting to impress who-ever, it eventually turned out that the thousand members actually spent less than one and a half hour outside in the streets. The rest of the eight hour shift was wasted on getting members in an organised way from the various stations to one central point, having parades and deploying the officers. (H)*

*Combatting crime no longer played the central role. That is very frustrating because we went to Highway Patrol to fight crime. We drove like apes behind empty busses with the African Games. During the World Summit we drove at 60km/h with blue lights in the emergency lane on the highway for visibility. I think this happens because of some officers trying to impress someone important. In the mean time crime thrives. One feels powerless because you are only but a clown in this big circus. (C)*

The derogatory terms “ape” and “clown in the circus” communicate a sense of being degraded to something to be laughed at. This sense of degradation and meaninglessness is severely painful in psychological terms as, apart from the humiliation and indignity suffered, it further implies failure to live up to the expectations of one’s ego ideal. The participants place this meaninglessness of their current working experience in direct opposition to their previous working experiences. They used to consider their work as meaningful, which had a positive effect on the work performed and acted as buffer against the effect or impact of traumatic incidents.

*All of us felt a sense of responsibility towards the public. We were even willing to work twelve hours, five days a week, which we did during the first year, without receiving any overtime. If that isn't proof of dedication and commitment, I don't know what is...What I'm trying to say is that our standards were very high then. My outlook on life and my experiences in the SAPS was very positive then. Even though one experienced horrific crime scenes that were traumatic, these were overshadowed by a positive sense of reward when making good arrests.*(A)

The “making of good arrests” implies that the officer is potent, powerful and masculine as opposed to being impotent and ineffectual.

The disillusionment of the changed situation is associated with the loss of something of value.

*Of the original 38 members, we're only 9 remaining... All of us are tired and simply “gatvol” [fed up]. We're all trying to either get a transfer, or find a job outside the SAPS... This is one of many events that made me realize that the HP I used to know has died and that I have to get out of this unit as soon as possible.* (A)

The unit, and in a sense the officer “who was”, has died and needs to be mourned. The sense of loss includes the loss of buddies and respected leaders. The use of the word “shepherd” in the following quote emphasises the spiritual components associated with this loss.

*To top it all our commander and second-in-charge have also now left. All the years' hard work is lost. We are without a shepherd.* (C)

Participants mention the change they experienced with regard to respect and discipline.

*Those times were easy, I was a Constable and all my work were based on orders given to me by my commanders and respect and discipline were one of the highest focus areas in the SAPS. There were no unions and members followed orders. I feel that, if an order is given to you that is not legitimate, it is the right of a member to question the order. On the other*

***hand it has become the right of the members to decide whether they wish to perform the duties given to them, or not. (P)***

A strict, autocratic military model where discipline and respect for orders is honoured is crucial for effective functioning in certain areas of policing, such as a tactical response team (Chandler, 1990). Strict discipline as well as respect for one's commanders create a sense of security in the military environment with the perception that someone whom you trust and respect is looking out for you and that you know exactly what is expected of you.

Participants mention a shift in priorities as way of coping with the changing situation.

***Currently I am overloaded with too much work and too little time to do it all in and I get worried about this. A few years ago I would have done anything to ensure that the job is done before anything else, but now everything has changed, as life does and my priorities have also taken on a different expectation... the joy of spending time with my family in our beautiful home sidetracks me... (J)***

The work is no longer the most important factor in this officer's life. From a psychological point of view, the focus on his family as a support group may be considered as a mentally healthy way of coping with work stressors. However, the majority of studies indicate that even if emotion-focused coping aids in maintaining emotional balance, a lack of problem-solving strategies appear to have negative implications for mental health (Billings & Moos, 1981; Mitchell et al., 1983; Solomon et al., 1988).

#### **6.5.5 Uncertainty and unfairness as stressors**

For a person to become a police officer, he or she must believe in the concept of fairness and justice; and that people get what they deserve.

***I am committed to perform my duties and enjoy seeing the criminal getting what he deserves. (P)***

This is maybe one of the reasons that perceived unfairness and injustices within the organisation have such a negative impact on police officers' mental well-being.

As was mentioned before, job security is highly valued by the police officer.

***I think that things went seriously wrong in the Police in the last seven years. There are no promotions, no transfers, is the police still a worthwhile career to consider? People must remember that we are grownups with responsibilities. I am 36 years of age, married and a father of two children. I do not want to be treated as a child. I need security and certainty in my life. (M)***

Here again the conflict between dependence and independence is noticeable. The message is: I am a father who is responsible for looking after my children, yet I am dependent on my “father” (the organisation) to provide for my needs. As Fairbairn (1941/1952) indicates, mature dependency needs to be mutually beneficial and respectful for it to be distinguished from immature dependency. It follows that a relationship with the organisation which leaves police officers with severe feelings of exploitation, humiliation and a total disregard for their needs and well-being, can only foster a state of immature dependency. Fairbairn (1941/1952) links this to all psychopathological developments in adults which trigger regression to the earlier state of immature dependency. Dependency is further connected with helplessness, which in turn exacerbates the effect of traumatisation. In this discussion the emasculation of masculinity can also be detected.

The implementation of Resolution 7/2002 created job uncertainty and bitterness. This is linked to the fact that the members perceived this resolution as unfair and haphazard.

***The good people had to go and the rotten apples stayed. At HP 31 of the 35 nominated people got another placing. 11 court orderlies were apparently sent to replace these 31 people. To today only 4 arrived. It does not make sense. One cannot train a policeman in two day to work at Flying Squad. Many years' experience and expertise is lost. How effective will HP now be? Yes I know transformation must happen, but couldn't they have thought it through? (M)***

It is noticeable how this officer's self-concept was influenced by various processes. From once being a dedicated and proud member, he now inadvertently forms part of

the “rotten apples” who stayed. In therapy I often encounter this decay and disintegration of police officers’ sense of worth, their feelings of competence and their sense of being able and capable men.

***Resolution 7 caused a big amount of consternation at HP because almost everybody that was affected by Resolution 7 have at some stage had conflict with X (the commander). Did he identify these specific members, or not?***  
(M)

The perception that various policies (such as Resolution 7 and affirmative action), were being used for “punitive” or other sinister reasons rather than the alleged official reasons, is evident in this insert.

***But the uncertainty still remains as nobody knows when the next “joke” is going to hit us.*** (M)

This reference to the effects of Resolution 7 is another example of the cynicism which is often used as a defence in the police culture (Bonifacio, 1991; Symonds, 1972).

Not only is racial discrimination considered to be a stressor, but participants describe nepotism, where some members are favoured in a one-sided way, as frustrating and stressful.

***And that is not because they are more competent than myself or other members, no, it is case of who is friends with whom when superintendents of Head Office and Area X go on “geleides” (where they earn extra money) while he does not know or can’t remember how to secure his firearm.*** (M)  
***Unfair favouritism of certain members by the senior management because they socialise together.*** (M)

***Some members have the attitude of doing the least they can. This places the burden on the few who naturally take the responsibility only to find that you are over worked, doing excessively more than persons of the same rank who earn the same salary as I do, and then the fact that so much work constitutes not being able to meet deadlines or keep petty admin up to date, needless to say which those who do almost nothing can do and are thus seen as first class reliable officers.*** (N)



Different sets of rules and different standards are seen as unfair by participants.

*...during weekends the reservists will use our vehicles to attend to complaints, even if they did not go for a driving course of a specific vehicle.*

(D)

*My concern is all drivers of Highway Patrol went through a driving course before they were allocated the vehicles. One driver per vehicle. What drove members crazy was that reservists damaged the vehicle, don't report it, they just park the vehicle and go home. When the original driver report for duty he must run around trying to fix the damage caused by somebody who is not the right full owner of the vehicle. This is the most frustrating problem we encounter at our work.* (D)

Some participants see no future for themselves within certain units or within the organisation itself. They feel stuck with no opportunity to be transferred to another unit and are scared of unemployment.

*At the moment it feels as if I'm trapped in an underwater cage and if I don't get free soon, I will drown. I'm at a stage where I'm doing everything in my power to get away from this unit. I have applied for a transfer to the X (an specific unit) twice without success. The reason is always the same: "Because of a shortage of manpower, a transfer cannot be granted without a proper replacement". Under "Resolution 7", it was alright though to transfer twenty-three members without replacement.* (A)

The statement "I will drown" clearly illustrates the severity of the situation.

Participants consider the unfairness and lack of consideration for their individual needs as an indication that the organisation does not consider them as special, and that it does not care about their well-being. The following participant studied in a certain field and applied for a transfer to a unit where his expertise could be applied.

*But a transfer is out. I did apply for a exchange transfer to X last year, but it was denied because of Resolution 7/2002. Previous applications for transfer to X was denied on the grounds of a shortage of manpower. Preposterous!!! 23 members were transferred from the unit without any*

*replacement with Resolution 7/2002.(C)*

*Transfers - that's only a rumour! (M)*

Helplessness is accentuated and external locus of control is reinforced.

## **6.6 Closing discussion**

In view of the specific traits which are traditionally associated with masculinity, it is clear why policing is historically the domain of males. The perceived role of being a policeman corresponds almost completely with the dominant approved attributes of masculinity such as toughness, powerfulness and authoritarian. The ability to make a difference means that one is capable, strong and potent; the antithesis of impotent. From the data it seems as if the current situation in the SAPS emasculates especially White, male officers, with negative consequences. It is important to note that to feel powerful, in control, skilled and competent are prerequisites for the survival of a police officer. Feelings of helplessness and impotence impact on an officer's locus of control and mental well-being.

A further implication of the transformation process of the SAPS is the decay of the once strong in-group identity, and White male officers currently find themselves in an alienated position. The position of estrangement and of occupying the "outsider" position holds various implications for the officers' mental well-being. This position needs to be considered in relation to the traumatising work environment and the finding 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 (Ottenberg, 1987).

The data indicate that not one of the three dimensions of Antonovsky's (1987, 1993) sense of coherence, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, is experienced by the participants. They have lost the sense of meaning in the work they perform and the safety of a fraternity which acts as a "trauma membrane", and they experience severe feelings of disillusionment, despondency and helplessness. This affects their self-concept and their interaction with the world.

Some of that which is not said in the essays, in other words the silences and omissions, need to be mentioned at this stage. The literature indicates that a considerable amount of ambivalence and job dissatisfaction is embedded within the police officer's relations with the community (Anderson, n.d.; Davidson & Veno, 1980; Kroes, 1985). Yet this possible source of job dissatisfaction is greatly underplayed by the participants in contrast to the conspicuous centrality of the organisation as a source of distress.

I also want to comment on the richness of the data and the degree of receptiveness with which participants shared their experiences through the narratives. This is significant given the various research findings which indicates that police officers are not eager to participate in psychological research. The participants did not know me personally. They entrusted their private accounts to an unfamiliar psychologist, something that literature indicates police officers have difficulty in doing. I attribute this to their profound need to be heard, acknowledged and affirmed. One participant ended his essay with a prayer for the police officer, and most participants expressed the desperate need for someone to listen, to hear and hopefully change the situation.

*Leave us to do what we have to do: fight crime. That is what we do well. The work we do is not always pleasant; i.e murder scenes, limited equipment, accident scenes where people are seriously hurt as well as the danger that we may get hurt in an accident or shooting. We consciously put ourselves at risk for the better of the community. We do not earn a big salary, but still we do the job because we are born to be police officials. Management, listen to what happens at ground level ... We want to be proud police officials, but nobody permits us.* (B)

I end this section with the plea of officer M:

*I hope that this glance into my work-life will help you [the researcher] to make a difference.*

## 6.7 Concluding remarks

In the preface to the second edition (1985) of his book, *Society's victims - the police. An analysis of job stress in policing*, William Kroes writes that when he was writing

the first edition of this book in 1975 he was still reacting to the shock of what he had uncovered. He wanted others to become aware and do something about what he described as an American tragedy.

Back then, I was full of hope and naively believed that all that had to be done was to make one aware of the problem and its significant consequences and others would be motivated to do something about it. It is now ten years later and the problems are worse than ever! The consequences to ignoring the plight of the police are as dire today, if not more so. It is my fervent wish that *this time* the problem will be heard (p.viii).

This need to be heard vibrates through time and space to the narratives of the participants in the current study. The desperation of this need are crystallised in Captain G's fantasy (case study A) to kill himself in order to be heard.

The study found a dissonance to exist between the dominant discourse on trauma in the SAPS and the individual experiences of police officers. Notwithstanding the fact that the participants acknowledge these incidents as severely traumatic, not one of the participants feels that he cannot cope with it. This contradicts the dominant discourse of the organisation which mainly focuses its interventions on trauma-related instances (as discussed in chapter two). The focus of the Employee Assistance Services on trauma in the SAPS might serve to strengthen the dominant discourse of the organisation and may act as facade for the organisation to demonstrate that they are doing something about trauma. This focus is politically more acceptable than admitting to the racial tension, injustices and insecurities generated by processes within the organisation.

Members of the SAPS function in an ambiguous environment. There is little structure and their tasks are ill-defined. A sad example of the ambiguity experienced by police members is found in a headline on the front page of the Beeld newspaper (Louw & La Grange, 2003): *Polisie "huil en haat"* (Police "cry and hate"). This headline refers

to officers' feelings after discovering the brutally murdered bodies of a baby girl, her mother and grandmother. Police officers are indeed exposed to multiple horrendous traumatic incidents which are often experienced as helpless, frightening and anxiety-provoking situations. Feelings of being overwhelmed, powerless and helpless may have a significant impact on officers' self-esteem and damage their feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability, which are necessary to cope in the street environment. South African police officers often feel undervalued, unappreciated and experience their work as mostly insignificant and meaningless. Most members cannot relate to the objectives of the organisation. It seems as if the organisation of the SAPS, functioning as a large group, often generates emotions which are unmanageable and uncontrollable. This is an anxiety-provoking experience for the individual and may certainly exacerbate the anxiety which results from being exposed to trauma.

The effect of trauma exposure is aggravated by various contributing circumstances. The transformation process in the SAPS creates a tremendous amount of uncertainty and insecurity, which together with the absence of an supportive in-group identity, leave police officers feeling extremely vulnerable, exposed and out of control, which creates yet further anxiety. The changing discourse in the SAPS leads to intense feelings of disempowerment within the rank-and-file of the SAPS. The condition of social immobilisation and paralysis restricts the potential of the organisation functioning as a large group (in psychoanalytic terms) to assist in integration. This in turn (ironically) inhibits growth and transformation. The lack of a supportive structure in the organisation of the SAPS results in free floating rather than contained anxiety. This has serious implications for the mental health of the organisation as well as its members. May et al. (1958) state that

when a culture is caught in the profound convulsions of a transitional period, the individuals in the society understandably suffer spiritual and emotional upheaval; and finding that the accepted mores and ways of thought no longer yield security, they tend either to sink into dogmatism and conformism, giving up awareness, or are forced to

strive for a heightened self-consciousness by which to become aware of their existence with new conviction and on new bases (p.17).

It seems as if the transformation process in the organisation of the SAPS led chiefly to a descend into dogmatism. According to the data racism, discrimination and prejudice still flourish; it is only the face of the target that has changed. It seems as if the attempt to redress old wrongs brings with it many new injustices.

Processes of change and transition always imply a loss of something that once was. As is widely recognised in psychology, an experience of loss can be linked to various mental health problems, such as anxiety, adjustment and mood disorders. From the discussion it seems as if White, male officers experience many losses during the transformation process. Although the previous structures, policies, practices and politics needed to change, their loss carries an immense psychological significance which needs to be acknowledged as such. As Kierkegaard pointed out, the two chief sources of modern people's anxiety and despair are, first, their loss of sense of being and, secondly, their loss of their world. The White, male police officer's sense of being, his masculinity, the meaning in the work he performs as well as the previous supportive structures have to a great extent been eradicated by the transformation process. This may explain the sometimes devastating levels of anxiety and despair he experiences.

The present research has distinct limitations. There is the political charge that I write from the position of being a White female. This is a given situation and is acknowledged as such. This study's area of focus is complex and politically loaded, and interpretation is far from exhausted. As the wisdom of the consulting room and the hermeneuticists tell us, a narrative is never concluded, it is always subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation and that such engagements are important steps towards deepening understanding.

My hope is that this first endeavour provides an impetus to further exploration and that it may contribute to a cognisance of the often complex and intricate consequences

that flow from decisions, processes and changes.

The need expressed by police officers to be heard has the implied wish that, once heard, things will change. This remains but a wish.