

**EXPLORING THE MEANING OF TRAUMA IN THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis which I hereby submit for the degree Doctor PhD (Psychotherapy) in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at another university.

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*It takes so little, so infinitely little, for a person to cross the border  
beyond which everything loses meaning: love, convictions, faith, history.*

*(Kundera, 1981)*

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## ABSTRACT

Discourses on trauma in the South African Police Service (SAPS) focus primarily on the experience of traumatic events as the primary reason for the emotional difficulties that members experience. This study questions this dominant discourse and examines additional discourses that may contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of trauma in the SAPS. The research entailed a qualitative analysis of 15 essays written by members of the SAPS, with the aim of exploring alternative discourses on the experience of trauma by police officers. The participants included fifteen male, officers from three units in the Gauteng region. The data were analysed within a psychodynamic frame, and findings suggest that police officers' reactions to trauma are significantly influenced by factors other than mere exposure to traumatic events. The history of psychological trauma indicates that constructions of traumatic stress are strongly connected with cultural, social and political circumstances. Current psychodynamic thinking emphasises the meaning of the real traumatic occurrence, which causes trauma by changing a person's experience of the self in relation to self-objects. The research results suggest that the sociohistorical circumstances in South Africa, the transformation effected in the police service, and political and structural uncertainty play an important role in contributing to an overwhelming sense of loss and uncertainty. Perceived losses include the loss of the supportive police subculture, loss of meaning in their work, loss of a sense of masculinity as well as loss of a sense of competence and agency. Findings further reveal that officers' experience a sense of being overwhelmed, powerless and helpless in the face of these historical and organisational changes. These feelings generate significant anxiety and impact negatively on officers' self-esteem. Feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability, which are necessary for effective coping in the policing environment, are negatively affected. Furthermore, without the existence of a supportive social group, this anxiety becomes uncontained and unmanageable.

### **Key words**

Trauma, South African Police Service, traumatic stress, organisational stressors, police subculture, psychodynamic approach

## OPSOMMING

Gesprekke oor trauma in die Suid Afrikaanse Polisie Diens (SAPD) fokus hoofsaaklik op die beleving van traumatiese insidente as primêre oorsaak vir die emosionele probleme wat lede ervaar. Hierdie studie bevraagteken die dominante redevoering en ondersoek addisionele gesprekke wat mag bydra tot 'n dieper begrip van die dinamika van trauma in die SAPD. Die navorsing behels 'n kwalitatiewe analise van 15 opstelle geskryf deur lede van die SAPD, met as doelwit om alternatiewe wyses te ondersoek hoe polisie offisiere gesprek voer of praat oor die trauma wat hulle beleef. Die deelnemers is vyftien manlike offisiere van drie eenhede van uit Gauteng. Die data is geanaliseer binne 'n psigodinamiese raamwerk, en bevindings dui daarop dat polisie offisiere se reaksies op trauma beduidend beïnvloed word deur faktore buiten die blote blootstelling aan traumatiese voorvalle. Die geskiedenis van psigologiese trauma dui daarop dat konstruksies van traumatiese stres nou verband hou met kulturele, sosiale en politieke omstandighede. Huidige psigodinamiese denke beklemtoon die *betekenis* van die werklike traumatiese gebeurtenis in die veroorsaking van trauma deur die verandering wat dit te weeg bring by die persoon se ervaring van die self in verhouding to self-objekte. Die navorsing resultate dui daarop dat die sosiohistoriese omstandighede in Suid Afrika, die transformasie van die polisie diens, sowel as politiese and strukturele onsekerheid 'n belangrike bydraende rol speel in die oorweldigende gevoel van verlies en onsekerheid wat polisie offisiere ervaar. Verliese wat beleef word sluit in die verlies van 'n ondersteunende polisie subkultuur, 'n verlies van betekenis in die werk wat hulle verrig, 'n verlies van die gevoel van manlikheid sowel as 'n verlies van bewaamheid. Bevindings dui verder daarop dat offisiere oorweldig, magteloos en hulpeloos voel in die lig van historiese en organisatoriese veranderinge. Hierdie gevoelens wek aansienlike vlakke van angs en het 'n negatiewe invloed op offisiere se eiewaarde. Gevoelens van kragtigheid, bekwaamheid en onkwesbaarheid, wat noodsaaklik is vir die effektiewe funksionering in 'n polisie omgewing, word negatief geaffekteer. Sonder die ondersteunende kragte van 'n subkultuur word hierdie angs vryvloeiend en onbeheersd.

## CHAPTER ONE: BEGINNINGS

### 1.1 Introduction

I would like to deviate from most traditional research and start at the non-traditional beginning, namely, my personal involvement in the research topic<sup>1</sup>. I was trained as a clinical psychologist and have been employed in the Psychological Services Unit (previously called Behavioural Sciences) of the South African Police Service (SAPS) for twelve years, of which the last eight years were spent mostly in doing psychotherapy with police members. In addition to the main focus on psychotherapy, my duties also include crisis intervention, suicide prevention, trauma counselling, trauma debriefing and hostage negotiation. In recent years I have become aware of a dissonance between the official discourse on trauma of the South African Police Service and the individual stories which members disclose in psychotherapy. I became interested in exploring this further and it emerged as a topic for my doctorate. Some would argue that this is not the route which scholars embark on in pursuing academic research. However, Parker (1992) and others argue that research is always carried out from a particular standpoint, and “the pretense to neutrality is disingenuous”(p.13). It is always worth considering the position of the researcher, “both with reference to the definition of the problem to be studied and with regard to the way the researcher interacts with the material to produce a particular type of sense” (Parker, 1992, p.13).

In addition, others (Becvar & Becvar, 1996; Hoffman, 1988) argue that our stories are socially constructed and the way in which they are presented is determined by the audience which is being addressed. As researcher I am comfortable with both of the

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<sup>1</sup> For some (e.g. Ratele, 2002, Potgieter, 1997) the use of the personal pronoun “I” is a politically transgressive gesture in the sense of violating scientific cannons of objectivity, rejecting the division drawn routinely between the everyday or anecdotal and academic theorisation. However, I accept that the production of knowledge is not universal and timeless but dependant of certain kinds of historically specific communicative acts, hermeneutic assumptions and power relations. The intended use of “I” is to affirm a selfconsciousness that researchers never occupy an unsullied, dispassionate position for they are inevitably always enmeshed in the research enterprise.

latter arguments and consider them complementary to each other. This stance is reflected in various contemporary South African research such as Potgieter (1997), De la Rey (1999), and Goldman (2003). My paradigm as psychologist is mainly grounded in psychoanalysis<sup>2</sup> and this influences my interpretations and analysis of content.

Some personal musings on the subject of trauma in the SAPS lead me to the following considerations. What seems to be emerging is that trauma (referring to the experience of a traumatic event) is blamed for most wrongs within the organisation. When commenting on issues such as the high suicide rate, the number of medical boardings, police brutality and corruption in the South African Police Service, the SAPS's spokesperson generally refers to the amount of trauma that police officials experience. Trauma is not offered as a reason in most of these instances, but rather as an explanation for the abovementioned behaviour. Media reports of traumatic incidents to which police members are exposed, with statements about the effect of trauma on police members, are the order of the day. For example, the heading of an article in Beeld newspaper reads: "Trauma in die polisie kan geweld kweek" (Trauma in the police may foster violence) (Trauma in die polisie, 2000). Another article (Otto, 2002) with the heading "When the price is too high ... Cops struggle to cope with stress on the job", implies that job stress and trauma are synonymous. The latter article further suggests that the experience of traumatic events is the main reason for emotional difficulties encountered by SAPS members. The implication of these and other similar constructions is that other factors which might contribute to or aggravate the experiencing of trauma is ignored in the official SAPS discourse.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Penguin dictionary of psychology (Reber, 1995) psychoanalysis is defined as 1. A theory of human behavior. 2. A doctrine associated with this theory. 3. A set of techniques for exploring the underlying motivations of human behavior. 4. A method of treatment of various mental disorders. Psychoanalysis was developed by Sigmund Freud but since then uniformity of viewpoint concerning what constitutes psychoanalysis no longer prevails (Arlow, 1992). Disagreements are so wide that Wallerstein (1988) raised the issue of whether there is no longer one psychoanalysis but perhaps several psychoanalyses. For the purpose of this study psychoanalytic thinking represents the broad spectrum of unified psychoanalytic theory (i.e., classical analytic theory with accretions from developmental, object relation, and self psychology theory).

At this stage it might seem as if I negate the effect of trauma on police officers. This is not the case. This thesis does not deny or belittle the harrowing impact that traumatic incidents have on police members. Nor does it disregard the number or horror of the scenes members attend, or the frightening and anxiety-provoking situations they experience. I do, however, believe that a broader exploration of contributing circumstances and processes might lead to additional discourses on members's experience of trauma. Trauma as research subject does not constitute a novel area of inquiry; however, I agree with Proust (cited in Gallmann, 1991) in saying: "*The real voyage of discovery does not consist in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes*" (p.254).

The following two case studies from my psychotherapy practice serve as apt illustration that despite the amount and severity of trauma which police officers experience through their work, they consider these as less destructive to their well-being than other factors that may be categorised as organisational stressors.

## **1.2 Case studies from the researcher's therapy room**

### **1.2.1 Case study A**

Captain G is a 37 year-old male who is married with one child. He presented in therapy with major depression, irritable and aggressive behaviour, anxiety attacks and suicide ideation. The clinical history indicates no previous personality disorder or psychopathological behaviour. Captain G has been a member of the SAPS for 16 years, was trained internationally and is highly specialised in the type of work he performs, namely the measuring of truths and lies in the South African Police Service<sup>3</sup>. The presenting problem which brought him to therapy is that he can no longer tolerate the lies, deceptions, injustices, corruption, nepotism and administrative "red-tape" within the organisation. He was promised a certain post and promotion which did not

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<sup>3</sup> In protection of the person's identity, this is the only information that may be disclosed.

materialise. Captain G has followed all prescribed routes to complain and submit grievances, but after more than three years he feels that he has not been heard. He seriously contemplates committing suicide in the office of the National Commissioner of the SAPS after sending letters concerning his grievances and a suicide note to the media. He believes (hopes) that if the National Commissioner or the general public were to know how bad the circumstances in the SAPS really are, they will inevitably change. His helplessness is vividly illustrated by this ideation; he feels that this is the only way that his voice will ever be heard and acknowledged by the organisation.

Captain G has been exposed to various traumatic incidences during his career. In one instance he attended a serious car accident on a remote dirt road and found a man and woman dead and entrapped in the wreckage. In view of logistical considerations it was decided to tow the wreck to the nearest police station and only then remove the bodies from the vehicle. Hours later, when the car was eventually cut open, the bodies of twin babies were found on the floor behind the front seats. Captain G still does not know whether the babies were alive at the scene of the accident, and whether they could have been saved if he had found them earlier. He remembers one of his first manslaughter cases in which an elderly man was killed in a motor vehicle accident. Captain G had to help undress the victim in the mortuary, and took care of the man's dog until family members collected it days later. He remembers with sadness the persistent howling of the dog. He recalls brutal interrogation techniques, cattle dying because their tendons were severed and numerous murder scenes of people butchered to death. Despite these and other traumatic incidents, captain G does not present with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He says that he can, and always did, cope with the work-related trauma. He has never participated in trauma debriefing and neither did he request therapy during his career. He experiences his work as meaningful and believes the latter incidents come with the territory of being a police officer. However, he despises the lies, deceptions, injustices, corruption and favouritism which he currently experiences in the South African Police Service. He cannot separate his identity from that of the organisation and seriously contemplates ending it all, not by resigning, but by killing himself.

### 1.2.2 Case study B

Inspector H is a 34 year-old male, married with one child. He presents with typical post-traumatic stress symptoms such as intrusive thoughts. He also experiences sleep disturbances, has recurring nightmares, suicidal thoughts and aggressive behaviour, and he abuses alcohol. He was stationed at the then Internal Stability Unit during the late eighties and early nineties and was as such involved in township riots, patrols and attacks. He saw many atrocities and participated in some of these, was often terrified of dying and traumatised by scenes of hatred, inhumanity, suffering and death. He strongly identified with the previous government's apartheid policies, which the police had to enforce. Because he dehumanised all people of colour in his mind and believed in the system he was enforcing, he did not experience atrocities against Black<sup>4</sup> people as inhuman. This helped him to "cope" during those times. His psychological problems and symptoms arose with the change in the political and social systems. The terrifying and mostly subconscious question that he has is whether he is to be regarded as evil if other races are indeed human. In the past he ascribed a sense of meaning to the work he performed (however distorted this might sound today) and he protected the government that employed him (and in which he believed). His symptoms of traumatisation appeared with the loss of this sense of meaning.

### 1.2.3 Brief discussion of case studies

These two case studies indicate that the police officers do not construct the incidents in which they are exposed to trauma as unmanageable. Rather, other factors such as political transformation, the context of social and organisational change, personal insecurity and a perceived lack of social support are experienced as unbearable. These and similar cases prompted my interest in the current study. The two individuals referred to above are both White<sup>5</sup> and raise the question of how Black people in the

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<sup>4</sup> Black is used here to indicate all people of colour that were previously disadvantaged.

<sup>5</sup> White and Black are in widespread use in present-day South Africa and the meanings of these terms have been shaped by the apartheid history.

SAPS system might experience what is happening today. However, I do not have a relevant case study of a Black person and the focus of this dissertation is not on cultural and racial issues *per se* but rather on the meaning of trauma. Nevertheless, racial and cultural issues are embroiled in the South African situation and are embraced as such. Without it being stated as a prerequisite, participants in the current study represent various cultural and racial groups in the SAPS. It might further be hypothesised that White members' experience of the transformation process in the SAPS are more negative than their Black colleagues' experience thereof.

Mental health professionals may argue that Captain G and Inspector H suffer from delayed onset and/or accumulative exposure to trauma. Experts often claim that they know what it is that ails the patient even though the patient strongly disagrees, pointing to another complaint (Young, 1995). Without entering into a debate about patients' insight into unconscious processes and other related issues, expert voices are heard more strongly than that of the patient. This study intends the voice of this often unheard segment of society to be heard and respects these members' own experiences and beliefs as being valuable.

### **1.3 The aim of the study**

The primary aim of the study is to explore how trauma experienced by South African Police Service members is constructed or "talked about" and made sense of. Questions and issues that are considered relevant to the primary aim are: which aspects in the working environment do *members* consider to be most stressful, traumatic and difficult to cope with; and, what is the effect of the change and transition processes on members' working experiences?

Given that the South African Police Service is the institution that is "studied" in relation to trauma, the next section provides some information on the SAPS and on the concept of trauma. A more extensive discussion follows in subsequent chapters.

## 1.4 Setting the scene

### 1.4.1 The South African Police Service (SAPS)

According to Van der Walt (2001), the level of crime has increased in South Africa since the process of transformation started in 1994. With this, the traumatising and suicide of SAPS officials has soared. Apart from other implications, the escalation of crime in society in general means an increase in the amount of traumatic incidences to which police members are exposed, as well as a heavier workload. The intensification of the fight against crime has made extra demands on the professional and emotional resources of the police (Thom, 1995). In South Africa members of the police service are challenged by various potential stressors such as the high crime level, organisational transformation and a lack of resources (Rothmann & Van Rensburg, 2002). Policing in South Africa is a dangerous job; for example, 114 members lost their lives in the line of duty from January 2003 to December 2003 (Holtzhausen, 2004). According to Botha (2002), the police officer of today is confronted with a myriad of anthropological-existential problems. “The country is still in a process of transformation, the South African Police Service is confronted with an unacceptably high crime rate and the individual in the organisation has to cope with extremely serious psychological problems” (Botha, 2002, p.48). The identity of the SAPS is undergoing an intense, mostly forced transformation process which has numerous implications such as a decay of the in-group identity (Van der Westhuizen, 2001), and feelings of uncertainty and insecurity (Nel & Steyn, 1997).

### 1.4.2 The concept of trauma

Trauma is currently a buzzword in both professional and laypersons’ language and as such its meaning often becomes vague. The term *trauma* literally means “wound” and until the late nineteenth century it referred to physical injuries (Garland, 1998). Popular discourse uses the word *trauma* at times to refer to an *incident* or happening that was traumatic, or to everyday *life stressors* like work pressure. Trauma is also used to refer to the *experience* of an event, for example something which is

experienced as being traumatic. Because the concept of trauma or “wound” refers to some kind of hurt that has been inflicted, the signs or symptoms of injury are often indicative of the trauma experienced. As such, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is often used as being analogous to trauma (with the added implication that no trauma has occurred if no symptoms are found).

For the purpose of this discussion the following two psychodynamic definitions of trauma are deemed important. Garland (1998, p.11) defines trauma as “an event that overwhelms existing defences against anxiety in a form which also provides confirmation of those deepest universal anxieties”. Lindemann (1944) defines psychological trauma as the sudden, uncontrollable disruption of “affiliative bonds” which alludes to the importance of social support. Disruption or loss of social support is intimately associated with the inability to overcome the effects of psychological trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1985; Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Conversely, many people remain fairly intact after psychological trauma as long as their environment restores a sense of trust and safety. According to Krystal (1978), it is not the intensity of the experience but the *meaning* for the individual that “posed the challenge and generated the affective response” that caused the ultimate post-traumatic adaptation.

## 1.5 Outline of the thesis

Chapter one provides the rationale behind the study as well as its context.

Chapter two focuses specifically on the South African Police Service (SAPS) as the context in which the research is conducted. It discusses the historical context of the SAPS, the SAPS as organisation, the process of change and transition as well as some consequences of the transition process.

Chapter three focuses on psychoanalytic theory and concepts related to trauma. A brief history of trauma and a discussion of psychoanalytic thinking related to trauma is used both as a point of departure and to contextualise the chapter. The final section of the chapter constitutes a deliberation of key psychoanalytic concepts which are

relevant to the current research.

Chapter four explores and engages with the trauma literature in terms of the main aims of the current study. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section engages with the international literature's construction of trauma in relation to law enforcement and policing agencies. The second section explores the way in which psychology in South Africa has constructed trauma. This is done by reviewing empirical studies published in the South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP) over the last three decades. The recent study on trauma as an organisational health problem in the South African Police Service follows the SAJP overview. The latter study is discussed separately because it is the only study of its kind in the SAPS with specific relevance to this research.

Chapter five discusses methodological considerations and motivates the focus of the study. It outlines the research process by describing, in some detail, the procedures followed in the recruitment of participants, the procedure of data gathering, the analysis of data and reflections on the research process.

In chapter six the results and research findings are presented and discussed. The chapter ends with concluding remarks.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE AS SPECIFIC CONTEXT IN WHICH THE RESEARCH IS CONDUCTED**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses specifically on the South African Police Service (SAPS) as the context in which the research is conducted. It discusses the historical context of the SAPS, the SAPS as organisation, the process of change and transition as well as consequences of the transition process.

### **2.2 The historical context of the South African Police (SAP)**

The South African Police Force (SAP) was established on 1 April 1913. Between this date and its disbandment in the early nineties, the SAP was frequently called upon to aide the military to overpower opposition to the government. This role became especially prominent during the apartheid years, when South Africa was generally described as a police state (Brewer, 1994).

Although the South African Police under apartheid perhaps most clearly demonstrated this colonial legacy, according to Brogden and Shearing (1993), police forces all over the world still remain focussed on repression rather than social empowerment. The centralisation of policing as a state function, is a principal source of the problems that have confronted contemporary policing. Colonial policing is by character closely linked to the interests and structure of the colonial state: “The police are centralized under the control of the government and they serve that government, rather than the law, performing several non-police duties for government” (Van der Westhuizen, 2001, p.38). The South African government relied on the police to maintain its colonial and apartheid policies (including, notoriously, its policies of racial segregation) in defiance of internal opposition and an international environment where decolonisation had become the norm. Policing in South Africa during the past decades thus isolated the police from a large segment of the community whose security it was

supposed to protect.

The move toward greater militarisation of the South African Police is symbolised by the development of “universal riot control”, the deployment of the police in what was then Rhodesia, and the use of armoured vehicles to quell township unrest. Although rhetoric that South Africa was a “police state” was strategically useful to opposition movements at the time, in fact the South African Police remained proportionally small, understaffed, under-funded and under-equipped (Brewer, 1994).

Although the police served the interest of the apartheid state, public accountability of the police should be understood within a broad social and historical context in which the police represented only one of many oppressive state structures. According to Van der Westhuizen (2001), the development and history of policing in South Africa needs to be placed within the context of broader government racial policies: “Police work was defined primarily as the policing of race relations and policing became a political activity” (p.40). According to Steinberg (2001), policing black communities in South Africa for the better part of the twentieth century boiled down to two imperatives: “controlling the movement of people, and squashing political opposition” (p.7). Steinberg says the set of rules that govern the relationships of everyday life was missing from the policing of black communities. He ascribes much of the violent crime committed today to the fact that “in the absence of law, relationships are regulated by the private appropriation of force” (Steinberg, 2001, p.8). An example of this is the lawless violence committed in the taxi industry.

In April 1994 the previous “enemy of the State”, namely the African National Congress (ANC), became the governing party of South Africa. Given its historic contribution to the apartheid government, the South African Police has been one of the main targets for change in the new dispensation. Transformation of the South African Police as an organisation implies a total reorganisation and restructuring of management and administration, as well as the way in which services are rendered. Transition from a police force with an emphasis on authoritarian decision making to a police service with an emphasis on community policing and participatory decision

making can be seen as a important and difficult challenge the organisation has to face.

### **2.3 The structure of the South African Police Service as organisation**

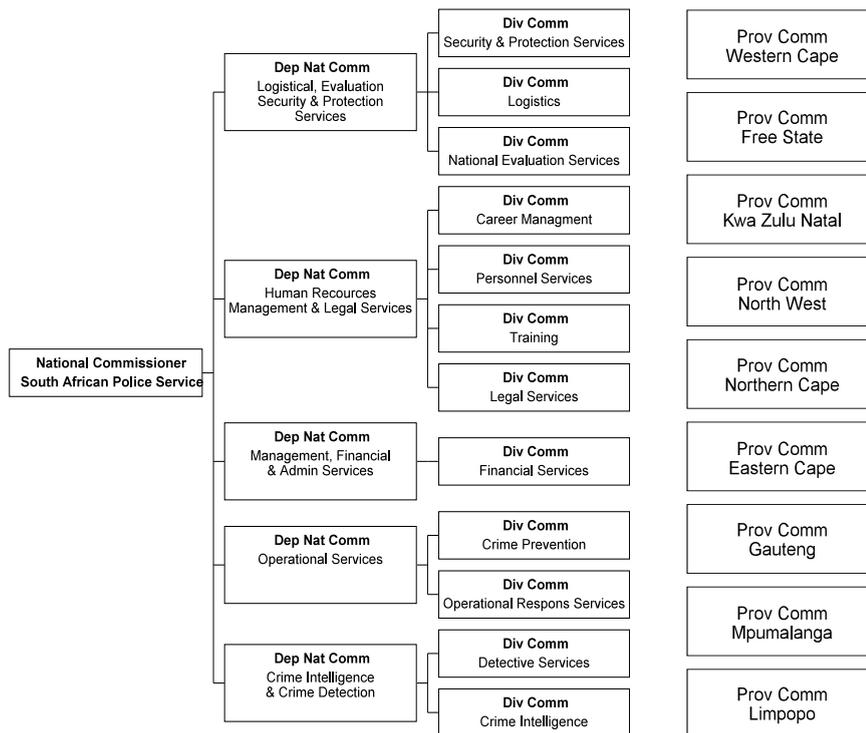
The South African Police Service (SAPS) came into being after the first democratic general election in 1994. This was done by a process of amalgamation of the South African Police (SAP) and all the homeland and self-governing territory police agencies. The South African Police Service's responsibilities and duties are regulated by the Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) and the South African Police Service Act (Act No. 68 of 1995). The South African Police Service is an extremely large organisation comprising 140 380 members (Personnel Planning Section, personal communication, July 12, 2004). The organisation has the task to "protect and serve" the community 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This means that members often work shifts and perform overtime duties. The members are often exposed to severe situations of trauma and appalling working conditions, such as a lack of basic necessities like toilet paper, vehicles or offices. The organisation is divided into national, provincial and area components with many units and stations operating within these divisions. One of the ramifications of such a large organisation and the structuring thereof is that issues of jurisdiction, command, coordination and control are constantly in question (Schärf, 2001).

It seems a daunting task to explain the complexities and sheer enormity of the organisational structure of the Police Service. This I will attempt to do, partly to indicate factors intrinsic to the organisation which greatly impact on the job of policing in South Africa. The organisational structure changes frequently. Graphic presentations of parts of the organisational structure of the SAPS are included as an aid to explaining the magnitude of this organisation. These graphic presentations are included in the text and not as addendums in order to simplify reading.

The National Commissioner heads the South African Police Service and has five Deputy National Commissioners, each heading a section. These sections each have various Divisional Commissioners heading further subsections, which are divided into

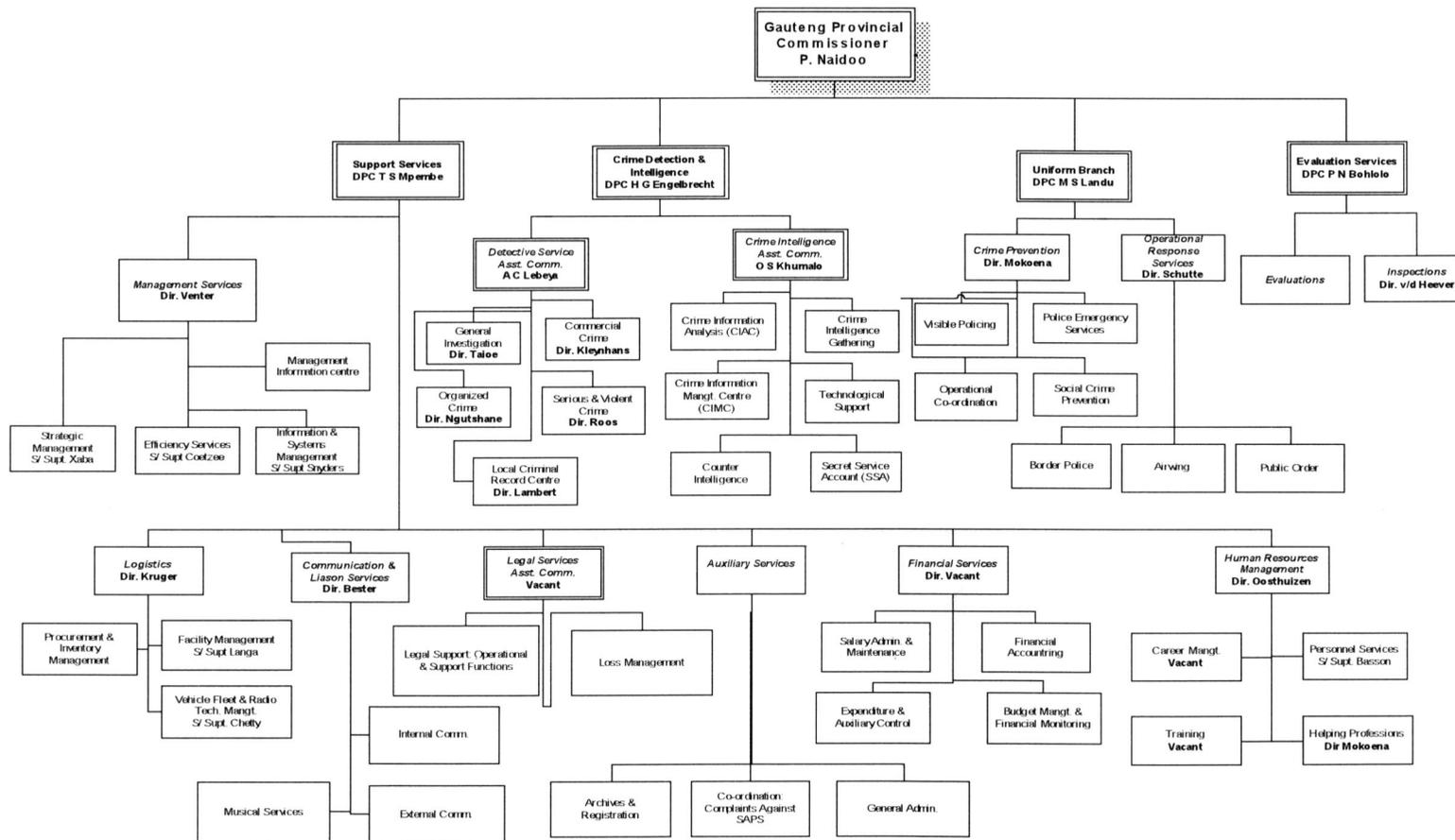
numerous other sections each with their own functions and personnel. This constitute the National Office of the South African Police Service.

## NATIONAL ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



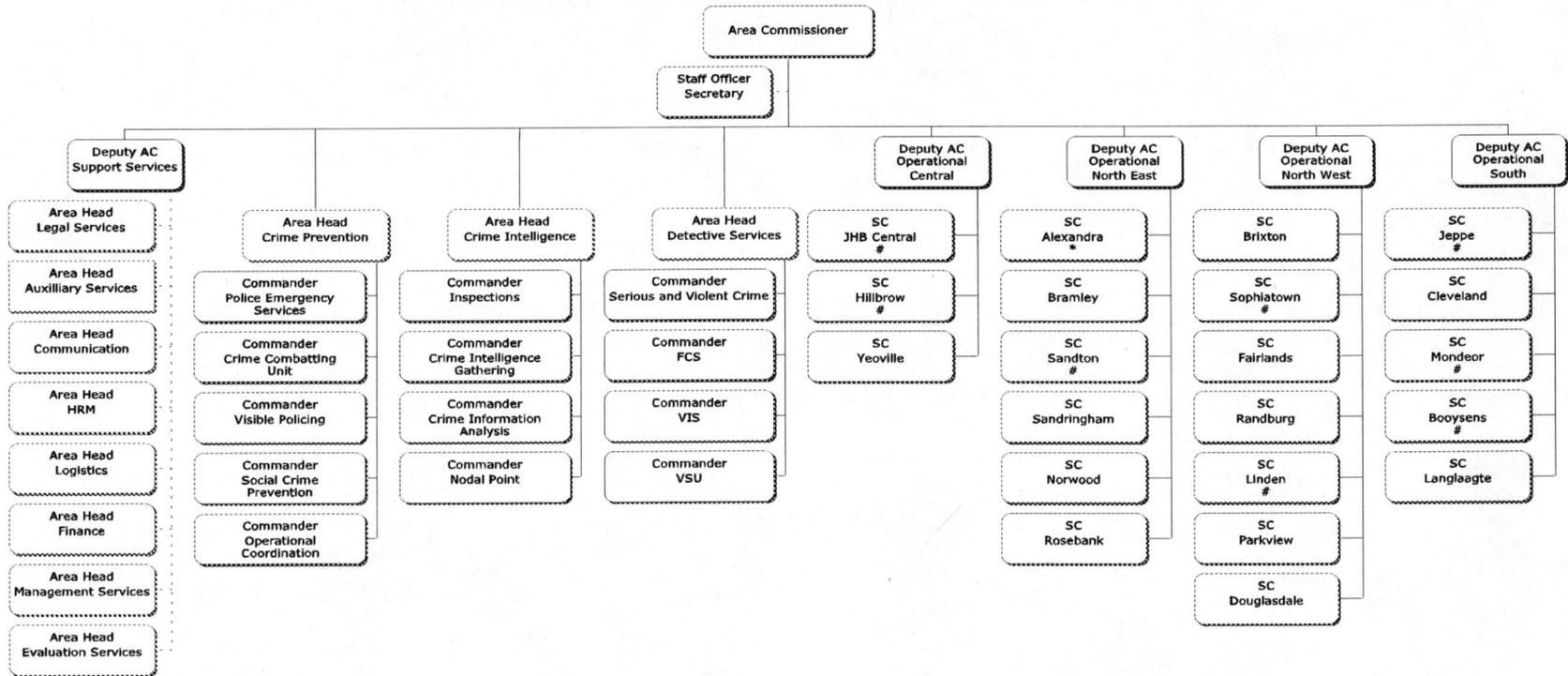
There are nine Provincial Commissioners each heading one of the provinces of South Africa. Each Provincial Office is divided into sections and subsections whose structures roughly copy that of the National Office.

# ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE: GAUTENG PROVINCIAL OFFICE



Each province is divided into various Areas with an Area Commissioner as Commander and the process of sections and subsections are repeated again. For example, Gauteng Province is divided into seven Areas. Each Area Office is structured roughly like the Provincial Office.

# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AREA JOHANNESBURG



In Johannesburg Area, for example, there are 21 police stations, each with a Station Commissioner and various structures and substructures. Each police station is again structured and divided as previously mentioned. Part of the complexity of policing is the fact that members often work in shifts. This means that a Station Commissioner or Unit Commander, for example, will probably never have all his or her personnel together at the same time. This constitutes a logistical and managerial nightmare. Because of the cumbersome nature and the magnitude of the organisational structure of the SAPS, role clarity and jurisdiction are often muddled. As will be discussed in chapter five, these factors hampered the research process.

#### **2.4 Structural and strategic changes during the transformation process**

*“Now that you have broken through the wall with your head,  
what will you do in the neighbouring cell?”*

(Lec in Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974, p.31).

The South African Police Service has gone through a number of strategic changes since the historic change in government in 1994. The new government moved swiftly to transform the top structure of the SAPS, to integrate elements of the former liberation movements and former homeland agencies, and to institute new policies such as community policing (SAPS, 1994; SAPS, 1995a; White Paper on Reconstruction and Development, 1994). Before 1994 the top structure comprised mainly of white males and many of the changes were focused on bringing about race and gender equality, especially in managerial positions. “The police command did much to put black faces in the front window, but in the absence of a policy of lateral recruitment from the outside, had little talent with which to work” (Steinberg, 2001, p.9). A total of eleven police forces had to be integrated, realigned towards the democratic state and retrained in the civilian approach to policing. The process of change and transition in the SAPS embraces commendable ideals. The transformation process of the police is primarily characterised by a movement toward democratic control over the Service. Values that have been accepted include accountability, transparency, community consultation and involvement, as well as an emphasis on

the quality of service delivery (Van der Westhuizen, 2001).

According to Laufer (2001), white reaction against democracy, rather than crime, was deemed to be South Africa's primary security threat when the ANC came to power. The result is that the police force was regarded as a risk to be tamed, rather than an instrument to be used. The consequence was the emergence of a police force that was stranded somewhere between the old and the new. Steinberg (2001) says that by the mid-1990s, the culture of the police was hollowed out, its moral reserves empty. He adds that "it was only in the late 1990s, when crime became one of the presiding preoccupations of South Africans and foreign observers alike, that the politics of fighting crime began to eclipse the politics of political containment" (Steinberg, 2001, p.9).

Although South Africa is searching for its own model of policing, taking into account the unique aspects of South African society, the current approach is very much in line with the British liberal model of policing (Brewer, 1994). This is a model that emphasises decentralisation, an absence of militarism and arms, and a police membership which fairly represents the social composition of society as a whole. Such a police service is perceived as a neutral arbitrator in social conflicts, is above political manipulation and control and operates on the basis of consensus and a mandate obtained from the public rather than the government of the day. This model also relies on modern management techniques, and well-trained professional officers. The problem, as noted by Brewer (1994), is that the liberal model of policing is being applied in South Africa at a time when this model is being criticised in parts of the academic police science literature as an illusion and no longer applicable to conditions in the modern world, including Britain.

Brogden and Shearing (1993) point out that the introduction of new forms of policing never happens instantaneously, but always involves a process of transition: "In policing, as in other areas of social life, there is no clean slate. We seldom - perhaps fortunately - have an opportunity to work from scratch" (p.93). This is particularly true of the SAPS where the transformation is from an authoritarian

system to a system which has to be sensitive to the needs of many different constituencies (Bellinghan, 1994). It is widely agreed that the police service needs to be reshaped to support and empower the community, but there are no packaged solutions that South Africans can simply embrace. International literature indicates that most organisational changes are ill-conceived and rarely shared with those affected, which leads to confused organisational structure, inadequate control, poor training, low motivation and poor teamwork (Woodcock & Francis, 1979). According to Steinberg (2001), the police discourse changed abruptly as the language of community policing replaced that of law and order, “but in the absence of serious organisational reform, the changing discourse only reminded police officers that the old culture was dying, the new not yet in sight”(p.9).

Some structural changes had the effect of making the organisation “top-heavy” with numerous commanders. In January 1996 there were 10284 officers out of a total of 141526 personnel (no earlier statistics are available), compared to 14613 officers in March 2004 out of a total of 140037 personnel (Personnel Planning Section, Head Office, SAPS, personal communication, July 7, 2004). In 1991 there were 41 Generals (SAP Jaarboek, 1991) in comparison to the 119 Commissioners in May 2004 (the ranks were changed: General became Commissioner). This has a negative effect on the line of command, jurisdiction and coordination of the organisation (as will be expanded on later). According to Chandler (1990) a too-rigid line on authority undoubtedly causes stress in law enforcement, but a blurring of those same lines will cause significantly more stress. In certain areas such as a tactical response team, a strict, autocratic military model is crucial for effective functioning.

The effort to demilitarise the organisation has far reaching implications, which are still not fully understood. According to Van der Westhuizen (2001), much of the SAPS’s identity was encapsulated within the power of the “Force”. Being a “Force” means playing an active and central role to the externalisation of destructiveness and identifying and responding to the traumatising environment as opposed to being passively at service and mediating the destructiveness. A mandate which support active functioning as opposed to passivity has clear implications on a person’s

experiences of helplessness. This will be expanded upon later in the discussion. However, in many respects the new SAPS still strongly resembles the old SAP. In practice the SAPS is characterised by an authoritarian culture and hierarchical structure that, among others, tends to inhibit effective devolution of decision-making processes. This pattern is repeated with change policy. It sometimes seems as if change is implemented for the sake of change alone, with little regard for the effect thereof. Nel and Steyn (1997, p.2) further note that “Another characteristic of some current policy proposals is that they are not yet sufficiently integrated within a holistic framework that takes account of, and is sensitive to the impact of these policies on the general mental health of police officials”. A study by Van der Walt (2001) reveals that the transition and traumatising context in the SAPS led to a condition of social immobilisation and paralysis, which limits social development, dialogue and communication. These processes restrict the potential of the organisation functioning as a large group (in psychoanalytic terms) to assist in integration and this, in turn, ironically inhibits growth and transformation.

Marshall (in Nel, 1994) states that the individual, the job, and the organisation are embedded in a social system. From this perspective, change will not be secured unless it is mediated on all of those levels. In order to successfully transform the SAPS into an empowering organisation, it needs to be transformed on all of those levels. Attempts at transformation are often aimed at creating change on the structural level of the organisation, and although such change is necessary, it is not enough. Van der Westhuizen (2001) believes that changes on the individual level in terms of attitudes, commitment to the new organisation, aligning individual values to those of the organisation, interpersonal effectiveness, the ability to effectively relate to the community and embracing a participatory style of policing need to take place to secure lasting change.

#### **2.4.1 Impact of change and transformation on the police subculture**

The South African Police encompassed a subculture with rigid boundaries between “us” and “them”. As Ainsworth (1995) says: “For any group whose authority, status

and role is challenged frequently, solidarity with other in-group members becomes increasingly important” (p.14). Since the inception of the South African Police, the organisation fostered a sense of “family togetherness” among its members. This police culture became enshrined in official organisational structures, policies and procedures, many of which contributed to social isolation. Although this social isolation had a protective function and provided the emotional and professional support members needed as a buffer against stress, it also contributed to an us/them mentality and to a separation between the police and the community (Nel, 1994). This divide often further entrenched the racial segregation between White and Black.

According to Botha (2002), the perception of continuous danger played an important role in the police’s alienation from the community. The constant scrutiny of the police by the public and media further contributed to the police service closing ranks and becoming more suspicious of outsiders. Evidence of this is the difficulty researchers still face in gaining access to the police (Ainsworth, 1995) and the secrecy surrounding crime statistics (Steinberg, 2001). As the South African Police removed itself from the community, a stronger in-group identity resulted (Ainsworth, 1995). The police was therefore prone to stereotyping members of the community and to defining them collectively as an out-group (Brogden & Shearing, 1993; Hagen, 1995). In turn this also lead to easy stereotyping of the police by the public. Ainsworth (1995) explains that for most members of the public the uniform itself is the most salient characteristic of a police officer, rather than the person inside it. This may further lead to a sense of dehumanisation and stereotyping.

The in-group identity of police officers is noticeable in the methods used to deal with the stress and trauma associated with the job. Trauma is mostly dealt with within the inner circle and wives or significant others are often excluded (Van der Westhuizen, 2001). This often leads to distancing and problems within intimate relationships. The methods mostly used to deal with stress and trauma include the use (and abuse) of alcohol, denial, joking and socialising - often exclusively with fellow officers. The existence of police canteens, where alcohol is sold at a cheaper rate, might contribute to this problem. Police canteens further reinforce the boundaries between “us” and

“them”, as members prefer not to socialise with the public even in their free time. Since socialisation is a process of identity transformation, police officials become socialised within the police subculture. Group dynamics are also evident in police language<sup>1</sup> with police officers, for example, often referring to the civilian society as “haasmanne en haasvroue” (Hagen, 1995, p.5).

The transformation process puts the identity of the SAPS under attack to a large degree. The strong in-group identity has to an extent broken up since the amalgamation of the national forces and the strong affirmative action policy enforced by government since the political transformation (Van der Westhuizen, 2001). Although this is in some ways a positive development, the decay of in-group identity has also resulted in major social and moral problems among police members (Nel & Steyn, 1997). As police officers are highly dependent on a trusting relationship with colleagues due to the potential dangers involved in policing, inter-group intolerance poses a threat to effective policing within the broader community (Ainsworth, 1995; Ministry of Safety and Security, 1995). Because of the current political stigma attached to the organisation’s in-group identity, the loss thereof may not be publicly acknowledged (let alone mourned).

Analogous to the rest of South African society, the police carries an enormous historical and cultural burden. Police officers had to uphold inhuman laws that have since been defined as unlawful, and the cultural divide was in a sense epitomised by the organisation. Police officers reflect a broader South African society historically characterised by problematic intergroup relations. Although society expects police officials to manage crime impartially, the attitudes, values and behavior of police officials mirror the broader South African community (Ainsworth, 1995; Brogden & Shearing, 1993; Ministry of Safety and Security, 1995; Nel, 1996).

The expectation that police officers should rise above the racial divisions of the

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<sup>1</sup> Police language refers to a particular use of jargon which evolved over the years within the SAP. The terms are not understandable by non-police persons, e.g. “Blougatte” as a term for recruits.

society from which they are drawn has become particularly intense since the early 1990s. These attempts at depoliticising the police has, ironically, placed the police at the centre of intense political inquiry. The historical perception of the police as an instrument of political oppression makes any attempt at distancing itself from politics doubly difficult.

In addition, the rise in crime since the 1990s has further increased demands on the police to function impartially and effectively. Steinberg (2001) writes that crime and the fear thereof is as old as South Africa itself. He says the South African preoccupation with crime bears testimony to how this country was stitched together with violence, “to how we worry that malevolence is our most abiding pedigree” (Steinberg, 2001, p.2). In this regard, Steinberg (2001) refers to the highly acclaimed South African novelist Alan Paton, who worried that the upheavals that shaped modern-day South Africa dissolved the elusive and delicate substance that allows us to treat each other as human beings. The politics of crime in South Africa has been called a nihilistic politics - a politics emptied of all meaning (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001). And it is against this meaningless force that the men and women of the SAPS find themselves as adversaries on a continual basis. The possibility might then exist that the policing of crime may also become a nihilistic politics, devoid of all meaning.

#### **2.4.2 Impact of change and transition on individuals**

Processes of change always imply uncertainty. For police officers, who place a high value on feelings of security (Chandler, 1990), as will be discussed later, this creates extra stressors (Anderson, n.d.). Strangeness and unpredictability can be a source of severe threat and stress: soldiers who know what to expect and what to do have a decreased likelihood of experiencing later psychological disorganisation (Rachman, 1978). (As will be discussed in chapter four, research on law enforcement personnel often draws on research done on military personnel). The fact that the active process of transformation in the SAPS is still incomplete after 10 years exacerbates the feelings of uncertainty. The unfortunate effect of transformation on many members is resistance against the transition process, uncertainty, negativism, low motivation,

low productivity and, ultimately, also issues relating to mental health (Karstel, 1995; Nel & Steyn, 1997).

The integration of eleven police forces through the transition process often meant combining people with a deep seated distrust and animosity towards one another in one organisation, to work toward a common goal. The nature of policing necessitates a trusting relationship between “buddies” to watch one another’s back. It thus follows that suspicion, hatred and mistrust may seriously hamper effective functioning as a police officer and contribute to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity.

Many of the changes in the SAPS are focused on bringing about race and gender equality with accompanying implications and tensions between individuals. In line with affirmative action, certain posts and positions are designated for specific race or gender groups. Individuals who do not form part of the designated groupings often feel violated, treated unfairly and discriminated against. Conversely, individuals from designated groupings sometimes feel that the perception is that they were allocated a specific post, not because of their competence, but because of affirmative action policy. Research indicates a lower job satisfaction rate among police officers from minority groups (Buzawa, 1984) and it seems that the lower satisfaction of minority police officers may be due to the friction and conflict associated with affirmative action issues (Alex, 1976; Buzawa, 1984; Jacobs & Cohen, 1978).

Mental health problems during the transition are reflected in the high and escalating turnover of personnel, an increase in medical boardings, as well as a high suicide rate compared both to the rest of society and to police services in other countries (Rothmann & Van Rensburg, 2002). Symptoms such as lack of patience, tension, aggression, moodiness, depression, alcohol abuse, emotional numbness, loss of motivation and interest in the outside world are apparent and adversely affect the ability of police officials to function in the family, social and professional worlds (Nel, 1994).

Nel and Steyn (1997) argue that the mental health of the SAPS cannot be addressed in isolation from the broader South African political context. One variable - political transformation - seems to be particularly dominant in influencing police officers' mental health. According to Nel and Steyn (1997) police officers are typically unable to deal with emotional and/or psychological ambiguity. Although police officers are often in life-threatening situations, it is not these situations themselves that cause mental health issues, but rather the fact that they occur in a context of social and organisational change, and personal and collective insecurity (Nel & Steyn, 1997). In attempting to understand why police officials previously seemed able to cope reasonably well with the demands of their profession, but now appear far less able to do so, Gioscia (in Nel, 1994) examined the role of systemic change. He suggests that within a given social system, individuals function most efficiently as a subsystem when their operations, including their social behaviour and thinking, are synchronous with the operations of that system. According to him, a state of achrony develops if change occurs in individuals as subsystems at a slower rate than in the social system they inhabit.

As mentioned before, a strong characteristic of the SAPS is its authoritarian culture and hierarchical structure. Problems related to authoritarianism are: adaptation problems, lack of responsiveness, external locus of control, reduced levels of commitment to mission and goals, lower job satisfaction, higher levels of conflict, higher staff turnover, and lack of innovation. All of these problems were indeed found to be evident in the SAPS in a study by Nel and Steyn (1997) of police officers' mental health. The impact of human resource policies (i.e. promotions, transfers, etc) on the mental health of members does not seem to have been considered, or has been negated. This is evident in the controversial Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) Resolution 7/2002<sup>2</sup>, which is aimed at match-and-placing members in posts with the overall aim of improved service delivery. The aim of improved service delivery is, however, often questioned as

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution 7/2002 agrees to the transformation and restructuring of the public service and provides for the redeployment, retraining and alternative employment of excess employees.

members are sometimes placed in posts for which they have no experience or training.

The expression of personal feelings is at best extremely limited in police culture. As professionals trained to serve and protect, police officers seemingly believe they are expected to maintain a poised presence even under the most dreadful of circumstances (Anderson, n.d.; Nel & Steyn, 1997; Violanti, 1996). This “machismo” image not only contributes to further isolation of police officers, but also prevents them from seeking help from anybody outside the in-group. The powerful myth of “cowboys don’t cry” is used in various media articles with reference to the police officer and has become almost synonymous with the SAPS. This myth stems from times gone by, where the “good guys” were placed in direct opposition to the crooks, the “bad guys”. Inevitably the “good guys” always won the fight. These heroes tamed the Wild West, and brought law and order to chaos. This they did by shooting rather than crying. Within the SAPS the option of “shooting the crooks” has been eliminated to a great extent (Section 49 of the Criminal Procedure Act, 51 of 1977). The image of a cowboy being brought to trial and punished for killing a crook is quite absurd within the myth. The sad part of this myth is that the cowboys still do not cry but shoot, although their victims are often themselves or their families. This myth also holds implications for the previously so-called helping professions (Employee Assistance Services) within the SAPS; to seek help is synonymous with crying, a fate which is sometimes considered to be worse than death. Often when the option of getting help is eliminated, the only alternative that remains is resigning from the organisation.

A police officer who wishes to leave the organisation has two options, either resignation or medical boarding. Boarding is the term used when members are declared unfit for service by a medical board due to physical or emotional factors. To be medically boarded holds far better financial benefits for the individual compared to resignation. For example, members who are medically boarded continue to be a member of the service medical aid and continue to receive a percentage of their monthly salary till they die. This also has serious fiscal implications for the

organisation.

The significant elevation in the number of medical boardings due to the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder at the time of the political transition (Thom, 1996) suggests that post-traumatic stress disorder has a definite political and social intent and meaning. The international literature also indicates an increase in law enforcement worker compensation stress claims (Stratton, 1986). As we will see in chapter four, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder may surface once individuals experience loss within a political context or feel morally alienated. The Head of the previous Health Management Service of the South African Police Service was quoted in the Pretoria News (1996) as saying: “It may be that officials seeking a way out, rather than to seek help, may exaggerate or fabricate symptoms of PTSD, often in an attempt to avoid having to deal with changes in the police as a result of political changes in the country”. Moral betrayal and the destruction of social trust may result in further trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder is currently the main diagnoses for police officials opting to leave the organisation on psychiatric or mental grounds (P. Jooste, Medical Boards, SAPS, personal communication, July 23, 2003). Because of its relevance to the construction of trauma in the SAPS, the implications and difficulties of a PTSD diagnosis will be discussed in chapter four.

Within the organisation there is little sympathy for a member admitting to suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. A member admitting to having post-traumatic stress disorder is often viewed by colleagues and management alike as preparing the grounds for leaving the organisation, rather than seeking treatment for an illness. Tuohy (1968) found the group’s acceptance of a soldier returning from “stress leave” to be highly indicative of the individual’s readjustment or subsequent breakdown. The disorder is also often denied on an individual level since active police members consider admitting to post-traumatic stress disorder to be a flaw in their “armoury” which could hamper their continued efficiency. As Hamilton (1988) found, many soldiers have to rely upon their grandiose self and their harsh and high self-expectations to carry them through the dreadful aspects of war. Members often only admit to having post-traumatic stress symptoms as a means to a end, namely to get

medically boarded.

Another reason why admitting to post-traumatic stress symptoms is often denied on an individual level, except as a reason to be medically boarded, may be found in the lack of treatment options available to members. Access to psychological and psychiatric treatment by the official medical aid is severely limited (R1 617 per family per year in 2004, subject to day-to-day limits) and most members do not have access to adequate professional treatment within the organisation. No psychiatrists and few psychotherapists are employed by the organisation. In a study conducted on psychological burnout amongst psychologists in the SAPS, Van der Walt (2001) found firstly that the psychologists experienced the organisation and the social context as traumatic, and secondly that the psychologists were traumatised by working with police officials. The turnover rate for psychotherapists is high, with only a few staying for longer than five years.

Conversing about mental health issues implies that one looks at the treatment thereof or, in other words, the organisation's response to the difficulties or symptoms experienced by police officers. This dissertation argues that the official discourse of the organisation does not regard the abovementioned difficulties as originating from the processes of change and transition, but rather as a manifestation of individuals' exposure to trauma.

### **2.4.3 The organisation's response to the situation**

Trauma debriefing and suicide prevention are two national projects which fall under the auspices of the Employee Assistance Services (EAS) of the SAPS, which include Psychological Services, Social Work Services and Spiritual Services. The EAS is supposed to fulfill a supportive function to the organisation and does not carry much weight with regard to policy making, transfers or working conditions of members (personal communication, Director Grobler, Head: Psychological Services, 21 August 2003). A reason for the existence of the EAS in the SAPS may be found in the police subculture. Police officers' social world often consists only of colleagues

as they feel they cannot relate to someone from outside the group. Help may thus only be offered and accepted from within the “inner circle”.

#### **2.4.3.1 Trauma debriefing in the SAPS**

Mitchell’s Critical Incident Stress Debriefing model (Mitchell & Everly, 1996) is used in the SAPS as the format on which trauma debriefing is based. The only national document referring to trauma in the SAPS is the National Instruction 18/1998 with the heading: “Debriefing of employees who have experienced traumatic incidents”. This document states that employees of the service are often exposed to traumatic incidents in the performance of policing functions. According to this document, if such employees do not receive timeous debriefing, a real danger exists that the employees may develop post-traumatic stress symptoms. This instruction is issued in an attempt to provide for the effective debriefing of traumatised employees. The instruction governs the process of debriefing from the designation of a coordinator for trauma management, the reporting of a traumatic incident, the training of commanders as initial debriefers, to the keeping of a trauma register. The implied message is that traumatisation is a separate, identifiable entity; something that can be handled through debriefing. The suggestion is also that debriefing can cure traumatisation or, that it can prevent symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder from occurring. Although it is not officially stated, members of the Employee Assistance Services have mentioned that a member who refuses to be debriefed may not at a later stage use that specific traumatic incident as a basis (reason) for medical boarding.

The study by Ncokazi (2003) on factors inhibiting individual participation to trauma debriefing in the SAPS found that 80.30% of the sample did not attend trauma debriefing, although 74.43% reported that they were familiar with the nature, process and purpose of the procedure. The study utilised a quantitative methodology and does not provide in-depth discussion of the various factors that inhibit members from attending trauma debriefing.

Debriefing forms part of possible treatment programmes and as such lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say that there is a fair amount of critique directed at debriefing *per se* (Gist, 1996; Raphael, Meldrum & McFarlane, 1995). According to the present researcher, the value of trauma debriefing does not necessarily lie in the type of model used but rather in the traumatised person's perception that someone (or the organisation) cares enough to listen to his or her trauma. Other than its debriefing policy, it seems as if the organisation disregards the effects of trauma on its members. As mentioned before, this is reflected, for example, in the extreme limits placed on psychological and psychiatric treatment by the official police service medical aid as well as in the limited number of therapists available in the organisation.

#### **2.4.3.2 Suicide prevention programme in the SAPS**

The suicide rate in the SAPS is much higher than the average rate of 18 per 100 000 of the general population (Rothmann & Van Rensburg, 2002). According to Schlebusch (2000), the suicidal rate in the SAPS stands at approximately 4 per 10 000. The prevention of suicide was designated to the EAS in the South African Police Service and a national suicide prevention programme was established. This programme focuses on presenting suicide prevention workshops to members. According to the author, such an approach reflect lateral thinking processes and seriously oversimplify relevant issues such as the impact of organisational stressors on police officers' coping abilities. A sad parody is the suicide of one of the suicide prevention coordinators in 2000, an event that was not recognised officially or publicly.

The dominant discourse and sentiment in the SAPS is often that members are provided with the necessary support and blame is apportioned to the individual. In a media statement on suicide incidents (SAPS, 2000) Assistant Commissioner Basson commented on three separate incidents of suicide by police officials over a period of 24 hours. The statement reads: "Police officials are to be seen as the protectors of the community and should not be feared because of their lack of self-control or professional conduct". She states that exposure to trauma cannot be seen as an

“excuse” (for committing suicide) and lists support structures such as Crisis Line and debriefing programmes. In a conversation with the researcher, an EAS manager commented on the high number of suicides committed in that week (a total of five) by expressing relief that the suicides had occurred in different regions so that the statistics would not be so badly affected, and so that the EAS manager “would not look so bad”.

## **2.5 Concluding remarks**

It could be argued that many of the ideals set out in 1994 for a new South African Police Service still remain an idealistic dream in 2004. The strong in-group identity has been replaced with no identifiable identity, decentralisation with a lack of control or accountability, and militarism with a lack of discipline and respect. Although previous structures, patterns, or ways of operating were by no means altogether efficient, good or even correct, the “loss” needs to be recognised. As is widely acknowledged in psychology, an experience of loss can be linked to various mental health problems, such as anxiety, adjustment and mood disorders. The author’s personal experience is that these disorders are by far the most common mental health problems cited by members of the SAPS who seek psychological intervention<sup>3</sup>. It appears as if one of the most common fallacies about change, namely, the conclusion that if something is bad, its opposite must of necessity be good (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974) forms part of the process of change in the SAPS.

The next chapter constitutes a theoretical overview of trauma and concentrates on psychoanalytic theories and concepts related to trauma.

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<sup>3</sup> No official mental health statistics are available within the SAPS.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF TRAUMA**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on psychoanalytic theory and concepts related to trauma. As was mentioned in chapter one, psychoanalytic theory reflects my epistemology. Much of the trauma literature in psychology has been based on a psychoanalytic paradigm (Garland, 1998; Van der Kolk, 1987). A brief history of trauma and a discussion of psychoanalytic thinking related to trauma is used as a point of departure and to provide a context for the study. The final section of the chapter constitutes a deliberation of key psychoanalytic concepts which are relevant to the current research.

The historical perspective on trauma indicates that since the earliest involvement of psychiatry with traumatised patients there have been vehement arguments about the aetiology of trauma. Is it organic or psychological? Is trauma caused by the event itself or by its subjective interpretation? Or is it perhaps caused by pre-existing vulnerabilities? Are trauma patients malingerers who suffer from moral weakness, or do they experience an involuntary disintegration of the capacity to take charge of their lives? (Van der Kolk, Weisaeth & Van der Hart, 1996). The way in which clinicians and researchers regard trauma has shifted over the years. Recent authors such as Allan Young (1995) have asked whether this shift reflects a change in the symptomatic expression of traumatic stress in Western culture over time, or rather whether clinicians have focussed on different aspects of the same syndrome during the past century and a half. The question becomes relevant if one looks at the historical meaning of this shift of focus. While not being able to answer these questions with any certainty, the following section attempts to clarify certain aspects of the questions posed.

### 3.2 A brief overview of the historic construction of trauma<sup>1</sup>

The effects of trauma on humans were described for the first time in the 1860s by physicians such as John Erichsen and Herbert Page. The effects of trauma were mostly associated with railway accidents and were called “railroad spine”. From this genesis, the role of mental factors, especially that of fear and the desire for compensation, was recognised in the onset of symptoms (Erichsen in Young, 1995). Thus the concept of trauma as physical injury (*wound*) was extended to include psychogenic ailments whose starting point was the experience of *fear*, conceived as a memory, of traumatic pain. It was discovered early on that fear seemed to play an important part in cases of both surgical and nervous shock: fearful patients sometimes died before their surgery and the surgeons linked their deaths to the power of their emotions (Young, 1995). Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996) mention that an association between psychological trauma and hysteria has been noted ever since psychiatry was recognised as a scientific discipline. A traumatic memory was considered to be different from an ordinary memory because the individual was unable to assimilate its meaning (Janet, 1925) and it was noted that the failure to integrate traumatic memories led to dissociation.

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud showed an interest in traumatic events during two periods: the years between 1892 and 1896 when he examined the causes of hysterical attacks, and the years following World War I when he turned his attention, very briefly, to the aetiology of the war neuroses. His original theory postulated actual sexual experiences during infancy and early childhood as the cause of all trauma and the basis for neurosis. In his later work with war veterans, Freud acknowledged the role of actual experiences in the development of neuroses, and distinguished between traumatic neuroses and anxiety neuroses on the basis of whether a neurosis was caused by a real occurrence or an imaginary experience.

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<sup>1</sup> This section of the discussion relies strongly on Allan Young’s “The harmony of illusions: Inventing post-traumatic stress disorder” (1995). The primary sources are not easily accessible and/or are written in French or German.

According to Freud (1919/1955a), traumatic neuroses were caused by real experiences such as accidents, death and combat, whereas anxiety neuroses were the result of sexual and aggressive fantasies based on early witnessing of the primal scene. In his short paper, “Thoughts for the times on war and death”(1915/1957), Freud recognised not only that “in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality”, but that in the death of an other, even when it is someone we love, there is something of a triumph for the survivor. Added to the impact of the traumatic event is the task of mourning, for others and for the self - for the person’s own lost world, pre-trauma life and identity, as well as guilt feelings. Freud also compared the fear of losing one’s own life with the fear of taking someone else’s life. This suggested that a person might also be traumatised by the violence he<sup>2</sup> inflicts on others, and thus a soldier can be both the victim and perpetrator of his traumatic violence. With this observation, a place is opened for traumatic guilt alongside traumatic fear.

Freud believed that the pathogenic agency is invested in the patient’s *memory* of the trauma. When the attached affect of traumatic experiences is discharged, memories of the events become ordinary recollections and are accessible to the conscious mind. A reaction discharge is, however, not always possible and undischarged memories are said to enter a “second consciousness” (Freud, 1966, p.153) where they become secrets, either isolated from the conscious personality or available to it in a highly summarised form. The paper, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920/1955b) reflects on Freud’s experience with soldiers who had survived extremely frightening experiences during World War I, and who showed a compulsion to repeat in recurrent memories and re-enactments of some of the most frightening moments of the experience, as though they needed to do this in order to master the anxiety produced.

Throughout the twentieth century, wars and its devastating effects on humanity have had a profound impact on the development of ideas surrounding trauma. Most army doctors in World War I were inclined to believe that flawed heredity and constitution

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<sup>2</sup> Between 1895 and 1974 the study of trauma centred almost exclusively on its effects on white males (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). Using “he” is in this sense not ignoring women but reflective of the historic state of affairs.

have a determining effect in the majority of cases of war neuroses (Smith, 1916; Wolfsohn, 1918), which stigmatised the condition. The German neurologist Herman Oppenheim (1885), who was the first to use the term “traumatic neurosis”, proposed that functional problems are produced by subtle molecular changes in the central nervous system. Ascribing an organic origin to traumatic neuroses was particularly important in combat soldiers as it offered a honourable solution for all parties involved (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). Abram Kardiner (1941), an American psychoanalyst in World War 2, describes the symptomatic reaction that follows traumatic events as a form of adaptation. It is an effort to eliminate or control painful and anxiety-inducing changes that have been produced by the trauma in the organism’s external and internal environments. The kind of adaptation that occurs in a particular case will depend on the individual’s psychological resources and the person’s relations to his primary social group (Kardiner, 1959). In Kardiner’s account, traumatic events create levels of excitation that the organism is incapable of mastering, and a severe blow is dealt to the total ego organisation. The individual experiences this as a sudden loss of effective control over his environment which leads to an altered conception of the self in relation to the world. After World War 2, psychological interest in trauma declined until the Vietnam War (1969-1975).

The immense impact of the Vietnam War on the psychological health of veterans led to the current classification and “defining” of trauma in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Young, 1995; Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). Careful research and documentation of what is now labelled post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) began in earnest after the Vietnam War when a large number of American war veterans suffered from undiagnosed psychological effects of war-related trauma. The Vietnam War was different from previous wars in that it was experienced as dreadful, filthy and unnecessary (Allerton, 1970; Bourne, 1970; Haley, 1984). Public support was minimal and the meaning of the war was questioned by society. In 1978 the psychiatrist Chaim Shatan listed typical symptoms of what he called “post-Vietnam syndrome” namely, guilt, rage, psychic numbing, alienation and feelings of being scapegoated (Shatan, 1978). Post-traumatic stress disorder was adopted by the American Psychiatric Association as part of its official nosology in 1980 and included

in the DSM-III (APA, 1980). PTSD in relation to the current study will be discussed in chapter four.

Through the years the effect of trauma on people has been called various names such as “railroad spine”, “traumatic neurosis”, “cardiac neurosis”, “shell shock”, “war neurosis” and “combat neurosis” and culminated in the current label of post-traumatic stress disorder. Perhaps the most important lesson from the history of psychological trauma is the intimate connection between cultural, social, historical, and political conditions on the one hand, and the ways that people approach traumatic stress on the other (Fischer-Homberger, 1975).

### **3.3 Shifts and developments in psychoanalytic thinking relating to trauma<sup>3</sup>**

What has been largely overlooked in accounts of psychoanalytic theory concerning trauma is that Freud himself used the word trauma rather loosely in a range of contexts and circumstances (Greenacre, 1967), and that the term *trauma* is used just as loosely today among both psychoanalysts and non-analytic clinicians (Yorke, 1986). According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), the use of the term trauma or “wound” in psychoanalytic terms implies three ideas: a violent shock, a wound (which would relate to castration anxiety or narcissistic injury), and consequences which affect the whole organisation of the psychic system.

Developments and shifts in classical psychoanalytic thought and the emphasis on the role of fantasy in the development of trauma are well documented by Ulman and Brothers (1988) and Scharff and Scharff (1994). These authors note that Freud’s underestimation of the role of actual traumatic experiences in the development of adult psychopathology was challenged in the writings of many classical psychoanalysts including Ferenczi (1913/1952), Anna Freud (1967) and Masson (1984), all of whom emphasise the reality of early childhood traumatic experiences. In line with Freud’s

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<sup>3</sup> This section is organised according to psychoanalytic themes rather than according to a chronologic account of events.

later acknowledgment of *the role of real experience* in the development of the symptoms of trauma, the revisionist school of thought, including the work of Kardiner and Kelman with war veterans (cited in Ulman & Brothers, 1988), represents a shift away from the role of fantasy in the psychogenesis of symptoms in response to exposure to traumatic experiences. According to this view, reaction to trauma occurs as a result of the disturbance in adaptational functioning which results from “a pathological alteration in images of the self and the outer world”(Ulman & Brothers, 1988, p.59). This view adds a valuable contribution to the understanding of trauma in that it highlights the disillusionment that occurs with regard to the individual’s *sense of self*. The unconscious meaning of exposure to the trauma of combat is understood in terms of the individual’s sense of having failed to live up to an idealised sense of self. The important contribution of this approach is the shift in the person’s sense of uniqueness and strength to one of vulnerability, worthlessness and dependency.

Infantile *dependency* is also highlighted by Fairbairn (1941/1952) in all psychopathological developments in adults. Fairbairn’s contribution to the development of psychoanalytic theory lies in the shift from viewing the development of personality as a closed system, with emphasis on inner instincts and drives within the individual, to an emphasis on interpersonal or social relationships in which the individual is viewed as an open system, constantly interacting with the environment. This interaction is considered as central to the development of the personality. Behaviour is therefore motivated by a dynamic self, constantly seeking an object from whom it will gain recognition, security and nurturance. More specifically, Fairbairn proposed that central to healthy personality development is the existence of “trusting, good-enough early experiences with the mother (object)” (Scharff & Scharff, 1994, p.50). Incorporated in his view on the development of the personality is Fairbairn’s important description of the process of differentiation from the object.

Fairbairn highlights the fact that the individual is constantly dependent upon relationships with others in the outside world, but that the nature of this dependency shifts from one in which the infant does not perceive its distinction from others, to one in which the dependency is mutually beneficial and respectful. This holds important

implications for the victims of trauma, as the traumatic experience is likely to trigger or cause a regression to early immature dependency in which the person is dependent on the other for survival (Scharff & Fairbairn Birtles, 1997). The experience of trauma therefore results in a regression to what Scharff and Scharff (1994) refer to as “the most fundamental trauma” which is “that the child cannot count on being held securely and with respect for the body, the mind, the emotions, and the essence of the child” (p.62). It therefore triggers regression to the earlier state of immature dependency involving early intrapsychic conflicts and directly affects the manner in which the individual relates to inner and external objects in his or her world. Dependency is linked to helplessness; and Freud hypothesised that when the “stimulus barrier” is breached, the mental apparatus is flooded with excitation, causing a feeling of helplessness (Van der Kolk, 1987).

Scharff and Scharff (1994) and Ulman and Brothers (1988) note that the neoclassical school of theorists, including Greenacre and Jacobson, made valuable contributions to the theory of trauma in their focus on *development and regression*, and their emphasis on the central role of the *sense of self* in determining reactions to real traumatic experiences. Jacobson’s (1959) major contribution to the theory of trauma lies in her emphasis on the individual’s sense of self in the experience of trauma. Her view of trauma is that of a narcissistic disturbance in the ego which involves problems in the development and maintenance of the sense of self as a result of conflicts between different self-representations. Because of the experience of trauma and the resultant narcissistic regression, the patient’s initial self-representations, organised in accordance with a healthy sense of self-respect, are altered to form new self-representations based on a painful sense of self as worthless and humiliated. The ensuing conflict between these different self-representations is seen as the major cause of symptoms. Jacobson’s contribution to the theory of trauma is important in terms of her emphasis on the *process of regression* as a result of a traumatic experience, as well as her emphasis on the effect of trauma on the *sense of self*.

Greenacre (cited in Ulman & Brothers, 1988) added to the theory of trauma in her proposal that trauma is an “inevitable part of psychological development” which every

individual is likely to experience, and that it is the “timing, type and intensity”(p.50) of the trauma that are the crucial factors in the psychogenesis of symptoms. Greenacre proposed that the “primary traumatogenic event” of witnessing the primal scene renders the individual susceptible to the development of pathology later in life when *traumas are imbued with meaning* based on early traumatic events. Greenacre’s work is valuable in that she linked the concept of regression to early experiences of trauma in her understanding of later experiences of trauma. A range of experience may be traumatic. On the one hand, these may be violent and unexpected incidents but, on the other hand, the event may be apparently minimal but one which “owes its importance merely to its intervention in a psychical organisation already characterized by its own specific points of rapture” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p.467).

Once Freud had moved away from the notion that all anxiety derived from undischarged libidinal excitement, he relocated anxiety firmly within the ego (Garland, 1998). The ego can differentiate between anxiety experienced in an actual situation of danger (automatic anxiety) and anxiety experienced when danger threatens (signal anxiety). Signal anxiety warns of an impending situation of helplessness. According to Garland (1998), this distinction holds true in most lives, but once the threat of annihilation has been encountered face to face, something changes: once the ego has been traumatised (or raptured), it “can no longer afford to believe in signal anxiety in any situation resembling the life-threatening trauma: It behaves as if it were flooded with automatic anxiety” (p.17). She calls this a crucial factor in the loss of symbolic thinking in the area of the trauma, which is a marked feature of the behaviour of survivors.

Through his exploration of the inner world of trauma, Kalsched (1996) found that the traumatised psyche is self-traumatising: “Trauma doesn’t end with the cessation of outer violation, but continues unabated in the inner world of the trauma victim, whose dreams are often haunted by persecutory inner figures”(1996, p.5). His second finding is the seemingly perverse fact that victims of psychological trauma continually find themselves in life situations where they are retraumatised: “It is as though the persecutory inner world somehow finds its outer mirror in repeated self-defeating ‘re-

enactments’ - almost as if the individual were *possessed* by some diabolical power or pursued by a malignant fate” (Kalsched, 1996, p.5).

According to Garland (1998), universal anxieties that are potentially traumatic for anyone have a single crucial feature in common: “they (the anxieties) consist of the separation from, or the loss of, *anything that is felt to be essential to life*, including life itself”(p.16). Kohut (1977, p.104) called the distinguishing feature of trauma “disintegration anxiety”, an unnameable dread associated with the threatened dissolution of a coherent self. Ulman and Brothers (1988) who based their work on the tenets of Kohut’s theory of self-psychology, argue that “it is neither the reality nor the fantasy that causes trauma but, rather, that the unconscious meaning of the real occurrence causes trauma” (p.2) by changing the person’s experience of the self in relation to self-objects. At the core of Ulman and Brothers’ (1988) theory of trauma is the view that the traumatic experience shatters the individual’s sense of self in ways that are intolerable. The self is viewed as the centre of mental activity and plays a vital role in organising the meaning of experience. The trauma therefore takes on an unconscious meaning which challenges and undermines the person’s sense of self, and is symbolically represented in the symptoms of trauma.

To conclude, according to psychodynamic theory, traumatised individuals are faced with the task of integrating the traumatic event into their understanding of the meaning of life, self-concept, and world image (Gerrity & Solomon, 1996). The emotional reactions of traumatised individuals are viewed as the result of discrepancies between internal and external information (Horowitz, 1986; Horowitz & Kaltreider, 1980; Schwartz, 1990; Widom, 1989).

The following section attempts to present the basic tenets of the psychodynamic approach which are essential to understanding the discussions and analysis which follow in the dissertation.

### 3.4 Basic tenets of the psychodynamic approach

The psychodynamic perspective believes the mind to consist of two distinct systems, the conscious and the unconscious<sup>4</sup>. When we deal with an emotionally loaded situation, both systems operate in parallel according to their own ways of experiencing and understanding the meaning of that situation (Langs, 1988). The conscious response is logical and problem solving. The unconscious reaction includes all those frightening desires and painful thoughts and feelings that the conscious mind finds too distressing to acknowledge, much less deal with. A fundamental principle of the psychodynamic approach is that behaviour is the result of conflict between the conscious and unconscious systems. Human behaviour is the product of the unconscious mind's attempts to express and gratify its desires and the conscious mind's defences against those attempts (Freud, 1986).

Freud (1923/1955c) devised a theory of mind to describe the relationship between the conscious, the unconscious and the individual's development of a set of moral values. He formulated a topological structure of the psyche that has three components: the id, the ego and the superego. All three have their own spheres of influence, but are also influenced by each other. The id is entirely unconscious, is governed by the pleasure principle and wants all its needs satisfied immediately. The ego deals with reality, understands logic and is capable of organising experience and behaviour. The essential function of the ego is to master the environment and the id (Brenner, 1973). The superego is defined by Cameron (1963) as "an organisation of mental systems whose major functions are those of scanning ego activities at all levels, of supplying approval and disapproval, self-criticism and self-esteem" (p.188). The superego operates on the conscious level as conscience, is punitive on the unconscious level and (according to some theoreticians) contains the ego ideal. The ego ideal is basically a view of one's self as perfect and loved. It is an unconscious image of being without a flaw or weakness. The ego strives to attain these perfect qualities regardless of

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<sup>4</sup> Some psychoanalytic writings, however, refer to three layers of consciousness, namely, the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious.

whether or not they can be realised. The ego ideal has a major influence on one's self-esteem: satisfying the ego ideal brings about pleasurable feelings of self-confidence and self-worth.

The ego tries to satisfy the id and the superego while seeking to maintain some control over them. When the ego fails to satisfy the person's conscience by permitting too much gratification to the id, the person experiences guilt. Feelings of shame result when the ego fails to live up to the expectations of the ego ideal (Piers & Singer, 1971). When the ego anticipates impending shame or guilt, or being overwhelmed by strong id impulses, it experiences anxiety. The ego uses defence mechanisms to avoid feeling anxious when it cannot remove the cause of the anxiety (Freud, 1920/1955b). However, the ego's use of defence mechanisms comes at a price as they "deny, falsify, or distort reality"(Hall & Lindzey, 1957, p.49).

A characteristic of the id is that it permits opposing impulses and feelings to coexist alongside each other and to demand that each be gratified at the same time. But the ego cannot tolerate the simultaneous presence of incompatible wishes, ideas or feelings in relation to someone or something. The term "ambivalence" is used to describe the simultaneous experience of feelings of love and hate for someone or something. The nature of ambivalence is complex. First of all, ambivalence is characterised by the simultaneous operation of opposing feelings and secondly, ambivalence is present to some degree in every emotional experience. Thirdly, when the opposing feelings grow in intensity so that they can no longer be controlled by the ego, repression is used to keep one of the opposing feelings from awareness while allowing the other to become conscious. Finally, it is usually the negative feeling that is repressed and the positive feeling that is given access to consciousness (Moore & Fine, 1968).

Within the context of the development of psychoanalytic thinking on trauma, the following theoretical concepts are deemed most relevant to the current study and are therefore given further attention below.

### **3.5 Theoretical concepts linked to a psychoanalytic construction of trauma**

#### **3.5.1 Traumatic memory versus ordinary memory**

Ordinary memories fade and belong to the past. They are eventually confused and conflated with other ordinary memories and assimilated into webs of remembrance. When they penetrate into the present, it is as nostalgia, regret, and a desire for things now gone. In each of these respects, the traumatic memory is different. Years after its creation it remains unassimilated, a self-renewing presence, perpetually reliving the moment of its origin (Horowitz, 1976). According to Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996), the post-traumatic syndrome is the result of a failure of time to heal all wounds. The memory of the trauma is not integrated and accepted as a part of one's personal past (history); instead it comes to exist independently of previous schemata (i.e. it is dissociated). The traumatic memory is dominated by imagery and bodily sensation, and is in these respects similar to the memories of young children (Herman, 1992).

Immediately after a traumatic event, almost all people suffer from intrusive thoughts about what has happened (McFarlane, 1992). These intrusions help them either to learn from the experience and plan for restorative actions (accommodation), or to gradually accept what has happened and readjust their expectations (assimilation) (Horowitz & Kaltreider, 1980). One way or another, the passage of time modifies the ways in which the brain processes the trauma-related information. Either it is integrated in memory and stored as an unfortunate event belonging to the past, or the sensations and emotions belonging to the event start leading a life of their own (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). When people develop post-traumatic stress disorder, the replaying of the trauma leads to sensitisation; with each replay of the trauma, there is an increasing level of distress. In those individuals, the traumatic event, which started out as a social and interpersonal process, comes to have secondary biological consequences that are hard to reverse once they become entrenched. These biological (mal)adaptations ultimately form the underpinnings of the remaining traumatic symptoms: problems with arousal, attention, and stimulus

discrimination, and a host of psychological elaborations and defences.

The psychological process through which irreconcilable memories are assimilated is believed to consist of phases and cycles: the conscious mind engages the traumatic memory → this encounter generates anxiety → the conscious mind disengages from the memory through denial, self-dosing with alcohol or drugs, etcetera → the level of anxiety is reduced, the conscious mind re-engages the traumatic memory and attempts to process it (via responses one and two) → anxiety increases, and a new cycle begins. Normally cycling and processing continue until the memory is metabolised, at which point it becomes part of the individual's inactive memory. That is, it is retrievable but is no longer intrusive. In effect it is buried in the past. PTSD is exceptional in this respect because its traumatic memory generates a high level of anxiety. Consequently, the engagement phase is brief and ineffective, and the memory cannot be buried. It lives on for decades, a source of suffering and socially and psychologically maladaptive behaviour (Horowitz, 1986).

Because of the timeless and unintegrated nature of traumatic memories, victims remain embedded in the trauma as a contemporary experience, instead of being able to accept it as something belonging to the past (Horowitz & Kaltreider, 1980; Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). One of the serious complications that interferes with healing is, according to Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996), that one particular event can activate other, long-forgotten memories of previous traumas, and create a “domino effect”. A person who was not previously troubled by intrusive and distressing memories may, after exposure to yet another traumatic event, develop such memories of earlier experiences.

The traumatic memory is a kind of pathogenic secret (Ellenberger, (1966/1993). Such memories are “pathogenic” because they are reputed to cause psychiatric disorders and “secret” because they are acts of concealment. Two kinds of concealment are possible. In one, the owners wants to hide the contents of their recollection from other people. In addition, they want to forget the memory themselves or, failing this, they want to push it to the edges of awareness. The second kind of concealment involves

a memory that the owners hide from themselves. They know that they have a secret memory, because they sense its existence, but they are unable to retrieve it; or, what is more common according to Young (1995), they do not remember that they have forgotten and have to learn about their memory from someone else, typically a therapist.

Freud found a home for the pathogenic secret in the patient's anxiety dream. These dreams originate, according to Freud, in the compulsion to repeat or the patient's unconscious urge to return to the situation in which the pathogenic trauma occurred. He stated that dream anxiety is instrumental as it attempts to anticipate, be it retrospectively, the danger that precipitated the trauma.

The discovery of traumatic memory revised the scope of two core attributes of the Western self, namely free will and self-knowledge (Dworkin, 1988; Harris 1989; Johnson, 1993). At the same time, it created a new language of self-deception (Rorty, 1985) and justified the emergence of a new class of authorities, the medical experts who claim access to memory contents that owners (patients) have hidden from themselves (Young, 1995). Post-traumatic stress disorder patients are assumed to have three main ways of responding to the cognitive dissonance that originates in traumatic experiences. They can attempt to reframe their traumatic memories, making the memory content consistent with their pre-existing cognitive schemas. They can attempt to revise the cognitive schemes, making them consonant with their memories. They can also try to empty the memories of their salience and emotional power or erect defences against them via denial, efforts at avoiding the stimuli that trigger recollections, generalised emotional numbing and other defence mechanisms.

### **3.5.2 Trauma, memory and a sense of self**

According to Young (1995), the term "memory" has three meanings in everyday usage: the mental *capacity* to retrieve stored information and to perform learned mental operations; the semantic, imagistic or sensory *content* of recollections; and the *location* where these recollections are stored. John Locke and David Hume proposed

that memory, in the second and third senses, is intrinsically connected to our conception of “self” and “self-awareness” (Richards, 1992; Warnock, 1987). “By connecting self-awareness with the past, memory provides the body with a subject and subjectivity” (Young, 1995, p.4). Our sense of being a person is shaped not simply by our active memories, however; it is also a product of our conceptions of “memory”.

The capacity to regulate internal states and behavioural responses to external stress defines both one’s core concept of oneself and one’s attitude towards one’s surroundings (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). Since a sense of “self” is derived from the interactions between children and their caregivers, and is founded on the important relationships of early childhood, trauma during this period interferes with the development of ego identity and with the capacity to develop trusting and collaborative relationships (Cole & Putnam, 1992; Herman, 1992). Results of recent studies indicate that vulnerability does play a significant role in the development of trauma, as well as in the long-term adjustment to living with the legacy of traumatic stress (Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, & Van der Hart, 1996). A large number of studies has shown that in both children and adults the security of the attachment bond is the primary defence against trauma-induced psychopathology (Finkelhor & Browne, 1984; McFarlane, 1987).

In recent years, much has been written about the effects of trauma on people’s sense of themselves and their relationship with their environment (Cole & Putnam, 1992; Herman, 1992; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Reiker and Carmen (1986) point out that

confrontations with violence challenge one’s most basic assumptions about the self as invulnerable and intrinsically worthy, and about the world as orderly and just. After the trauma the victim’s view of self and world can never be the same again, it must be reconstructed to incorporate the abuse experience (p.362).

According to Van der Kolk (1987) the essence of psychological trauma is the loss of faith that there is order and continuity in life.

Age and previous life experiences will profoundly affect the person's interpretation of the meaning of the trauma. Many traumatised individuals, particularly children, tend to blame themselves for having been traumatised. Assuming responsibility for the trauma allows feelings of helplessness and vulnerability to be replaced with an illusion of potential control. Trauma is usually accompanied by intense feelings of humiliation: to feel threatened, helpless and out of control is an incisive attack on the capacity to be able to rely on oneself. Shame is the emotion related to having let oneself down (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996).

### **3.5.3 Fear, pain and defences**

Intense fear - characteristically, fear plus the element of surprise - is an assault equivalent or analogous to physical violence (Young, 1995). Since it was found that fear (nervous shock) and injury (surgical shock) produce similar effects, the question arose of how they were connected to one another. Erichsen and Page (in Young, 1995) concluded that this occurs through patho-anatomical and/or pathophysiological pathways. Crile and Cannon (in Young, 1995) accepted this proposition but argued that it was only part of the story since there is one more element connecting fear with injury, namely pain. Pain is an experience that the organism strives to avoid, but it is also a signal of bodily injury and an indication of mortality. The meaning of fear lies in its pathogenic effects.

It is common knowledge that an unending state of arousal leads to exhaustion, a drop in blood pressure and death. But when exposure to traumatic shock is intermittent rather than continuous, Young (1995) mentions three possible ways in which victims can respond to their pathogenic memory. Some victims develop strategies and routines that allow them to avoid harmful stimuli (phobias), other victims simply give up (learned helplessness), and thirdly, victims of traumatic experiences may seek out circumstances that replicate their traumatogenic events. The last option is based on evidence that suggests that endogenous opiates (endorphin) may be released into a victim's bloodstream during moments of traumatic shock. In the case of post-traumatic stress disorder, the endorphin may have a tranquillising effect, reducing the

feelings of anxiety, depression and inadequacy that are associated with this syndrome. Over time, these people would become addicted to their endorphins and to the memories that release these chemicals. When the intervals between exposures grow too long, people can be expected to experience the symptoms of opiate withdrawal, namely anxiety, irritability, explosive outbursts, insomnia, emotional lability and hyper-alertness. These symptoms would exacerbate the ongoing distress intrinsic to post-traumatic disorders.

According to Young (1995), pain (of “withdrawal”) may build up to the point where individuals are induced to self-dose with endorphin by re-exposing themselves to traumatogenic-like situations. Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996) mention the compulsive re-exposure of some traumatised individuals to situations reminiscent of the trauma. Freud (1920/1955) thought that the aim of such repetition is to gain mastery, but clinical experience shows that this rarely happens; instead, repetition causes further suffering for the victims and for the people around them (Van der Kolk, 1989). In this re-enactment of the trauma, an individual may play the role of either victimiser or victim. Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996) cite three ways in which the re-enactment of the trauma may crystallise: harm to others, self-destructiveness and re-victimisation.

#### **3.5.4 Avoidance, numbing and dissociation as defence mechanisms**

The human response to sudden and overwhelming events is increasingly recognised as a stable psychological entity (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Figley, 1978; Green, Wilson, & Lindy, 1985; Horowitz, 1976). The central nervous system seems to react to any overwhelming, threatening and uncontrollable experience in a consistent pattern. Regardless of the precipitating event, traumatised people continue to have a poor tolerance for arousal. They tend to respond to stress in an all-or-nothing way: either unmodulated anxiety, often accompanied by motoric discharge that includes acts of aggression against the self or others, or else social and emotional withdrawal (Krystal, 1978).

The psyche's normal reaction to a traumatic experience is to withdraw from the scene of the injury. If withdrawal is not possible, then a part of the self must be withdrawn, and for this to happen the otherwise integrated ego must split into fragments or dissociate. Dissociation is a normal part of the psyche's defences against trauma's potentially damaging impact. Kalsched (1996) calls dissociation a trick that the psyche plays on itself, and says that it allows life to go on by dividing up the unbearable experience (trauma) and distributing it to different compartments of the mind and body, especially the unconscious aspects thereof. This means that the normally unified elements of consciousness are not allowed to integrate and experience itself consequently becomes discontinuous. The psychological defence of dissociation against the experience of unbearable pain carries a great internal cost, "the psychological sequelae of the trauma continue to haunt the inner world" (Kalsched, 1996, p.13). Kalsched (1996) describes dissociation not as a passive, benign process but rather as an active attack by one part of the psyche on the other parts, involving a good deal of aggression. Contemporary psychoanalysis recognises that where the inner world is filled with violent aggression, primitive defences are present too. The energy for dissociation originates from this aggression.

When people are traumatised the choice of defences is influenced by developmental stage, temperamental and contextual factors (Van der Kolk, Weisaeth, & Van der Hart, 1996). Once traumatised individuals become haunted by intrusive re-experiences of their trauma, they generally start organising their lives around avoiding having the emotions that these intrusions evoke. Avoidance may take many different forms, such as keeping away from reminders, ingesting drugs or alcohol in order to numb awareness of distressing emotional states, or utilising dissociation to keep unpleasant experiences from conscious awareness. This avoidance of specific triggers is aggravated by a generalised numbing of responsiveness to a whole range of emotional aspects of life. Many people with post-traumatic stress disorder not only actively avoid emotional arousal, but experience a progressive decline and withdrawal in which any stimulation (whether it is potentially pleasurable or aversive) provokes further detachment. To feel nothing is better than feeling irritable and upset. According to Van der Kolk (1987), it seems as though the chronic hyperarousal of post-traumatic

stress disorder depletes both the biological and the psychological resources needed to experience a wide variety of emotions. One of the most distressing aspects of this hyperarousal is the generalisation of threat. The world thus increasingly becomes an unsafe place.

### **3.5.5 The role of meaning on the experiencing of trauma**

Meaning is defined as that which has significance or importance. Gordon Allport writes in the preface to Frankl's (1959) *Man's search for meaning* that to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering: "If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering and in dying"(p.11). Nietzsche, as quoted by Frankl (1959, p.12), says that "(h)e who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*". If they can ascribe some sense of meaning to the trauma, victims often experience the symptoms of PTSD as natural reactions that do not require professional help (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996).

The personal meaning of a traumatic experience evolves over time, and often includes feelings of irretrievable loss, anger, betrayal and helplessness. Wolff (personal communication, 1995) attributes many of the delayed-onset symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder to a loss of meaning of the traumatic event. He postulates that many South African soldiers went through severe traumatic situations during the war in Angola without showing signs of PTSD because they could attribute some sort of meaning to the war. After 1994, when that meaning was questioned, the symptoms of PTSD multiplied and the diagnosis escalated.

The critical element that makes an event traumatic is the subjective assessment by victims of how threatened and helpless they feel. So although the reality of extraordinary events is at the core of post-traumatic stress disorder, the meanings that victims attach to these events are as fundamental as the trauma itself (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). A crucial element of an experience which becomes a trauma is the aspect of loss, be it loss of life, possessions, integrity or beliefs. When people lose their faith that their world is a safe, orderly and just place to live in, it

colours their relation to it. As such, individuals experience a loss of effective control over their environment and perceive the world increasingly as an unsafe place. (In object relations theory the absence or loss of a sense of meaning is linked with the loss of the object.)

After having been traumatised, only a minority of victims seem to escape the notion that their pain, betrayal and loss are meaningless. For many this realisation is one of the most painful lessons that the trauma brings and they often feel godforsaken and betrayed by their fellow human beings. Usually, suffering does not bring an increased sense of love and meaning; it more often results in loneliness and disintegration of belief (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996). The unpredictability of a traumatic event renders individuals unable to prepare themselves and may be viewed as a fundamental reason for the lasting consequences and severe feelings of helplessness experienced. The inability to take action in many traumatic instances emphasises the helplessness which triggers issues of vulnerability and dependency. According to Young (1995), the clinical ideology linked veterans' disorder with a loss of ontological security that was traced to the veteran's inability to reconcile their traumatic memories of Vietnam with their cognitive schemas, the moral codes, self-concepts, beliefs about human nature and notions of cosmic justice through which these men attempted to impose a sense of order and meaning on the world. Trauma challenges previously held assumptions, beliefs and understandings about the world and oneself in the world (Everly, 1995). When a person is victimised, three basic assumptions or beliefs about the self and the world are challenged. They are the belief in personal invulnerability, the view of oneself in a positive light, and the belief in a meaningful and orderly world (Janoff-Bulman, 1985).

### **3.5.6 Meaning and perceived support<sup>5</sup>**

Most researchers recognise that contextual factors are important in determining the

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<sup>5</sup> Although this section forms part of the theoretical concepts some empirical data is included to illuminate the point.

meaning of the traumatic event and in promoting or impeding recovery (Krugman, 1987). The personal meaning of traumatic experiences for individuals is influenced by the social context in which they occur. Victims and the significant people in their surroundings may have different and fluctuating assessments of both the reality of what has happened and of the extent of the victim's suffering. As a result, victims and bystanders may have conflicting assessments of the meaning of the trauma, and this might set the stage for the trauma to be perpetuated in a larger social setting. This, in turn, may lead to the allocation of blame and responsibility which then often becomes the central issue rather than the trauma itself. McFarlane and Van der Kolk (1996) found the issue of blame to be extraordinarily complicated. Trauma provokes emotional reactions and one way of dealing with these intense emotions is to look for scapegoats who may be held responsible for the tragic event.

Emotional attachment is probably the primary protection against feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness; it is essential for biological survival in children, and without it existential meaning is unthinkable in adults (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996). In recognition of this need for affiliation as a protection against trauma, it is widely accepted that the central issue in disaster management is the provision and restoration of social support (Raphael, Wilson, Meldrum & McFarlane, 1996). Lindy and Titchener (1983) have called the social support that surrounds victims "the trauma membrane". When people's own resources are depleted, outside help needs to be mobilised to compensate for their helplessness (Hobfoll & De Vries, 1995).

External validation about the reality of a traumatic experience in a safe and supportive context is a vital aspect in the prevention and treatment of post-traumatic stress. However, the creation of such a context for recovery can become very complicated when the psychological needs of the victims and the needs of their social network conflict (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996), or if the social network is depleted or unavailable. When there is a lack of validation and support, traumatic memories are more likely to continue to prey on the victim's minds, and to be expressed as anger, withdrawal or otherwise disrupted and disrupting behaviour (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996). It is noted in Kaplan and Sadock (1991) that the availability of social

support may influence the development, severity and duration of PTSD. This social support may be compared to the mother's holding capacity with regard to the infant in object relations theory. A study by Solomon and Horn (1986) found that the more support an officer had from fellow officers, supervisors and administration, the less post-shooting trauma occurred. Lifton (1983) found that many trauma survivors who report a lack of social support or find blame placed on them experience deeper scars as a result of this rather than the traumatic event itself.

McFarlane and Van der Kolk (1996) find it ironic that both the victims of PTSD and the larger society which has to provide support play a part in believing that the trauma is not really the cause of the victim's suffering. On the one hand, society becomes resentful about having its illusions of safety and predictability ruffled by people who remind them of how fragile security can be. On the other hand, many victims suffer from an impaired capacity to translate their intense trauma-related emotions and perceptions into communicable language. As such they find it difficult to articulate their needs.

According to McFarlane and Van der Kolk (1996) victims of trauma are vulnerable to being used for a variety of political and social ends, for both good and evil. Society's reaction to traumatised people is rarely the result of objective and rational assessments. Victims are often perceived as members of the society whose problems represent the memory of suffering, rage and pain in a world that longs to forget: "Repression, dissociation and denial are phenomena of a social as well as individual consciousness" (Herman, 1992, p.8). The issue of responsibility, individual and shared, is at the very core of how a society defines itself (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996). In *The culture of complaint*, Robert Hughes (1993) eloquently argues that trauma and victimisation can become over-inclusive explanations that prevent uncomfortable self-examination. This is true for both individuals and societies.

The complexity of the issue of social support is illustrated by the finding that after suffering from heart attacks, men with good social support and a good internal locus of control fared much better than men who had neither, but that men with good social

support and a poor internal locus of control did worse than those with poor social support but a solid internal locus of control (Kobasa & Puccetti, cited in McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996, p.29). This suggests that social support in the absence of an internal locus of control may in fact *impair* healing processes. Since trauma is known to decrease a victim's internal locus of control, the critical question becomes: what is the optimal amount of social support that will restore a sense of self-efficacy? The efficacy of social support depends, at least in part, on the amount of comfort that the individual victims derive from it and the extent to which it motivates them to take charge of their lives again.

Central to the role of victims in any given society are the demands that they place on the community's moral and financial resources. Providing reparation is part of the recognition that someone has been hurt. Contrary to general perceptions, few victims make strong demands for compensation and special privileges (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996). Many victims quietly acquiesce to their suffering; they are contained by their sense of shame and helplessness, as well as a need to maintain their self-respect and independence. Others noisily re-enact their traumas by either re-traumatising themselves or traumatising other people. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that once people have been traumatised, they are liable to be traumatised again (Breslau, Davis, Andreski & Petersen, 1995; Russell, 1986). Most victims who are conscious of the effects of trauma on their lives preserve their self-protective instincts and are highly ambivalent about having people find out what has happened to them. The weak are a liability, and, after an initial period of compassion, they are vulnerable to being singled out as "parasites and carriers of social misery" (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996, p.35).

It is widely accepted that the media is a powerful agent in the production and reproduction of dominant discourses (Hamlin, 1988; Masse & Rosenblum, 1988). The media is perceived as an authoritative source of information (Hall, Hobson, Lowe & Willis, 1980) and therefore plays a pivotal role in the ways that societies deal with traumatised individuals. The media is the prime purveyor of traumatic news. With the advent of satellite technology, it has become possible to invade homes with tales of

horror from all over the world which may blunt concern and trivialise the suffering involved (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996). At the other end of the scale, news reports may have the power of secondary traumatising, where people are traumatised by listening, reading or viewing horror stories.

Trauma research has been mostly conducted in Western cultures and one can expect to find differences in the meaning, support and symptomatology of exposure to trauma within different cultures. Given the rather marked differences in vulnerability and symptoms among Vietnam combat soldiers belonging to different ethnic groups (Kulka, Schlenger, Fairbank, Hough, Jordan, Marmar, & Weis, 1990), it is likely that the prevailing culture has a marked effect on the symptomatic expression of traumatic stress (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996).

### 3.6 Conclusion

It is clear from the history of psychological trauma that constructions of traumatic stress are strongly connected with cultural, social and political circumstances. Although current psychoanalytic thinking on trauma acknowledges the role of real experience in the development of the symptoms of trauma, the emphasis is placed on the *meaning* of the real occurrence which causes trauma by changing the person's experience of the self in relation to self-objects. The (often unconscious) meaning is believed to be symbolically represented in the symptoms of trauma. Because of the experience of trauma and the resultant narcissistic regression, the person's initial self-representations, organised in accordance with a healthy sense of self-respect, are altered to form new self-representations based on a painful sense of self as worthless, helpless and humiliated. As discussed, the distinguishing feature of trauma is associated with the *anxiety of a threatened disintegration of a coherent sense of self* (Kohut, 1977).

The self is viewed as the centre of mental activity and plays a vital role in organising the meaning of experience. According to psychodynamic theory, traumatised individuals are faced with the task of integrating the traumatic event into their

understanding of the meaning of life, self-concept, and world image. Universal human anxieties have a single crucial feature in common namely “the loss of anything that is felt to be essential to life, including life itself”(Garland, 1998, p.16).

Traumatic memory differs from ordinary memory insofar as it is timeless and unintegrated, which causes victims to remain embedded in the trauma as a contemporary experience instead of being able to accept it as something belonging to the past. The concept *memory* is intrinsically connected to the conception of *self* and *self-awareness*, and confrontations with violence challenge one’s most basic assumptions about the self as invulnerable and intrinsically worthy, and about the world as orderly and just. After the trauma the person’s views of self and of world can never be the same again; they must be reconstructed to incorporate the abusive experience. The psyche’s normal reaction to a traumatic experience is the utilisation of defences such as dissociation, avoidance or numbing which may lead to a generalised blunting of responsiveness to a whole range of emotional aspects of life.

The subjective assessment of trauma by the victims or the meanings that victims attach to these events are as fundamental as the trauma itself. The personal meaning of traumatic experiences for individuals is influenced by the social context in which they occur as well as perceived social support. It is important to remember that emotional attachment is probably the primary protection against feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness; without it existential meaning is not possible.

Chapter four constitutes the literature chapter and focuses on international as well as South African literature on trauma, with specific reference to the context of policing.

## CHAPTER FOUR: OVERVIEW OF TRAUMA LITERATURE

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the trauma literature in terms of the main aims of the current study, namely to explore how trauma experienced by members of the SAPS is constructed. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section engages with the international literature's construction of trauma and stress in relation to law enforcement and policing agencies<sup>1</sup>. The discussion focuses on dynamics specific to policing such as ambivalent feelings, addiction to danger and excitement, and the subculture phenomena. Effects of police work on officers, such as alcohol abuse, suicide, marital problems and traumatic reactions is highlighted. Although these variables and dynamics associated with policing are not recognised by the psychodynamic school of thought alone, it is this viewpoint which is highlighted in the discourse. As was indicated in the previous chapter on the history of trauma, psychology's construction of post-traumatic stress disorder as a diagnostic category in the 1980s has influenced the way in which trauma has been viewed ever since. PTSD is accordingly included in the discussion with specific reference to the relevance (or lack thereof) of the diagnosis to the policing community.

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

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

## 4.2 Trauma and stress in law enforcement agencies

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

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

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

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

Bloch (1969); Coleman, Butcher and Carson (1984); Rachman (1978); Solomon (1993) and Tuohy (1968) all point to sociocultural factors as playing an important role in determining an individual's adjustment to combat<sup>2</sup> situations:

- The more concretely and realistically war goals can be integrated into the values of the individual in terms of "his<sup>3</sup> stake" in the war and the worth and importance of what he is doing, the greater their protective effect on him.
- The soldier who is unable to identify himself with or take pride in his group, lacks the feeling of "groupishness" which is a highly supportive factor in maintaining stress tolerance.
- Esprit de corps or morale of the group as a whole also plays an important protective role. When the unit is demoralised or has a history of defeat and a high loss of personnel, the individual is likely to succumb more easily to anxiety and panic. This is especially true if soldiers also lack confidence in their leaders or in the importance of immediate combat objectives.

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

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<sup>2</sup> Combat is used in the broader sense to include situations of policing .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

problem” (Chandler, 1990, p.195).

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

### **4.3 Dynamics and variables specific to policing**

#### **4.3.1 The “police personality” as variable**

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

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

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

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

#### **4.3.2 Ambivalent feelings as variable in policing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

officers comes from the police department itself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4.3.3 The dynamics of addiction to danger and excitement in policing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4.3.4 The subculture or group phenomena as variable in policing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4.4 The effects of police work on officers

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

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

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

#### **4.4.1 Alcohol abuse as a consequence of policing**

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

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

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

#### **4.4.2 Suicidal thought and suicide as a consequence of policing**

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

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

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

suicide cases they studied.

#### **4.4.3 Marital problems as a consequence of policing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4.4.4 The effect of traumatic experiences on police officers**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

what clinicians in other circumstances might call melancholia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides information on the research methodology used in the current study of trauma narratives of individual members of the South African Police Service. The central aim of the study is to tell the story behind the statistics of trauma in the SAPS by examining the subjective experiences of members. The separation of chapters into theory, method and analysis is in a sense contradictory to the epistemological orientation of this work, which conceives knowledge as developing simultaneously out of theory, method and analysis. Nonetheless, these divisions are applied to enhance clarity in the presentation of the study and to conform to the task of writing a dissertation (De la Rey, 1999).

At this point it is perhaps apt to acknowledge the blurring of terms like methodology and method, a tendency that is widespread in the literature (De la Rey, 1999). Harding (1987) tries to deal with this by specifying that epistemological position(s) (assumptions about the foundations of knowledge) should be distinguished from methodology (a theoretical analysis defining a research problem and how research should proceed) and that this in turn should be distinguished from method (research strategy or technique). Despite Harding's attempt to achieve clarity the blurring of terminology continues in the literature. De la Rey (1999) suggests that this need not necessarily be viewed as problematic, since there are no clear lines of demarcation between epistemologies, methodologies and methods in qualitative research. Again, for the sake of clarity in writing this thesis, these divisions will be adhered to in this chapter.

The epistemological orientation of this work falls within what is termed social constructionism. One of the principles of social constructionism is that all knowledge is socially constructed (Hoffman, 1993). The following section speaks more to this issue. The possibility of objectivity as the ideal stance from which to generate knowledge (as proposed by quantitative methods) is thus rejected and it is rather

assumed that people's representations of the world are always mediated. As a result of this there is always an interpretative component in research (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994). The interpretative study of an issue or phenomena is widely noted as the defining feature of qualitative research methods (Banister et al., 1994, Babbie & Mouton, 1998). Given the theoretical framework and objectives of this study, there is a clear argument for the use of qualitative research procedures.

## **5.2 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research refers to any kind of research "that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Riessman (1993) points out that the term qualitative research refers to many diverse approaches that have some similarities but also differ on many substantive issues. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) thus refer to qualitative research as an umbrella term for several research strategies that share certain broadly defined characteristics.

The following key features of qualitative research contribute to the applicability of this research method to the current study. Research is conducted in the natural setting, the focus is on process rather than on outcome, the insider view is emphasised and the main concern is to understand social action in terms of its specific context (Babbie & Mouton, 1998, p.270). Qualitative research emphasises that human behaviour cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes that individuals attach to their experiences (Cresswell, 1998; Silverman, 1993). Further, it allows a window of opportunity for researchers to approach and examine the context of their study more holistically and with less rigidity (Banister et al., 1994; Becvar & Becvar, 1996; Greene, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Advocates of qualitative research have argued that human behaviour cannot be explained through a deductive form of logic with its accompanying intent on developing generalisations, such is the case with quantitative research (Cresswell, 1998; Silverman, 1993). Instead, the objective is to understand and interpret the meanings and motives that inform everyday human action (May, 1993; Mouton, 1990).

One of the broadly defined characteristics of qualitative research that is especially applicable to the current study is the focus on the study of meaning (Cresswell, 1998; De la Rey, 1999; May, 1993; Mouton, 1990; Silverman, 1993). Across the variety of qualitative approaches it is recognised that the meaning of human experience is worthy of examination and that research based exclusively on the examination of observable qualities is fundamentally limited. The main purpose of chapter six is the exploration of the experience of trauma in the context of the South African Police Service. Stated differently, what meaning is ascribed to the experience of trauma by members of the SAPS? The nature of the study, following Hollway (1984), is exploratory and intends to provide depth of focus and understanding rather than broadly representative data. The explorative description is the manner in which we try to understand experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Qualitative research places emphasis on studying human action through the eyes of the role players themselves, together with an emphasis on detailed description and understanding phenomena within the appropriate context. This might be done by listening to (or analysing) the voice, story or discourse of the participant. A primary feature of the qualitative framework is to ensure that the voices of participants are heard (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Oleson, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1984) note that a major characteristic of most qualitative research is that, when collecting data, the focus is on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings so that the researcher has a strong idea of what “real life” is like. Many social psychologists such as Habermas and Giddens (in Haug, 1987) have argued that it is crucial to contextualise individual experience within specific sociopolitical and ideological structures. These both construct human subjects and their behaviour and give meanings to social events (Levett, 1988).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) points out that “qualitative research, as a set of interpretative practices, privileges no single methodology over another”(p.3). Proponents of qualitative research highlight and acknowledge that this method of enquiry permits a considerable amount of flexibility (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Griffin, 1986). Qualitative research involves the use and collection of a variety of materials,

such as case studies, interviews, vignettes, photographs, personal experience and life story texts to understand and describe experiences and meanings in people's lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). It has been noted that data collected in this manner offer qualitative (rich, context bound) descriptions as opposed to quantified (observable, measurable) descriptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The nature of the research question in this study lends itself to a qualitative methodology in that this study attempts to understand what lies beneath a phenomenon by gaining "novel and fresh slants on things" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.19). The qualitative approach is of particular value in this study because it does not seek to achieve a broad or global statistical representation of a phenomenon. Rather, emphasis is placed on individual experience and the person's subjective understanding of his or her everyday life. Although ideas about psychological trauma seem to be widely encountered in the general clinical psychological and psychiatric literature, these ideas are rarely subjected to conceptual examination: "The effects of socially-loaded experience cannot be dealt in a simple way with the 'raw data' of what is perceived, but must incorporate social representations of the phenomena in question"(Levett, 1988, p.158).

Qualitative researchers highlight the socially constructed nature of reality, the intrinsic relationship between the researcher and what is being researched, as well as how the context shapes the inquiry (Banister et al., 1994; Burr, 1995; Griffin, 1986). Griffin (1986) points out that the epistemology of qualitative research acknowledges that human behaviour is significantly influenced by the context in which it occurs and also emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality. Furthermore, researchers have invariably found that qualitative methods are more suitable for sensitive and complex topics which require insight into the social tensions and realities of people (Griffin, 1986; Ragin, 1994; Silverman, 1993).

One of the most distinctive features which strengthens qualitative research is said to be reflexivity which encourages the researcher to be continuously self-reflective on the dynamics of the research design, process, evaluation and his or her integral

involvement in knowledge construction and dissemination (Bannister et al., 1994). The notion of reflexivity broadly refers to the position and role of the researcher both with reference to the definition and formulation of the research topic and with regard to the research process and the participants (Bannister et al., 1994; Dubois, 1983). The role of the researcher is thus brought into focus through his or her reflexivity and recognition of power dynamics in the research process (1985; Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1988; Krueger, 1981, Wilkinson, 1988). Reflexivity is thus about acknowledging the integral role of the researcher in knowledge construction, acknowledging that all findings are constructions which are continually changing and “being” reconstructed (Bannister et al., 1994). Instead of trying to eliminate the influence of the researcher’s understanding through detachment, the researcher’s perspective is embraced and addressed as a component of the knowledge generation process (De la Rey, 1999; Wilkinson, 1988). I play an inherent role in the construction of knowledge in this dissertation and I acknowledged this as such. This aspect of reflexivity will be expanded on later in section 5.6. In seeking to provide a starting point for this kind of enterprise, the limitation must be kept in mind that the author too has grown up and been trained in a particular sociohistorical moment, within similar dominant ideological structures (Levett, 1988). Researchers never simply collect their informants’ perceptions, rather they produce knowledge about them by means of a particular technology and social relations of production (Young, 1980).

I value the individual’s narration of experience and consider it meaningful to grant people the space to tell their own “truths” or stories. I strongly believe that the human world of experience is worthy of examination and as such I do believe that this study will contribute to new ways of understanding the experiencing of trauma in the SAPS. These are, however, the exact grounds on which qualitative research is being criticised by the quantitative methodologies which rather focus on the examination of “observable” qualities.

### 5.3 Social construction of narratives

A social constructionist perspective, like any, has implications for the way in which the world is viewed and made sense of, and as such affects the way in which research is conducted. Social constructionist research methods are qualitative, interpretative and concerned with meaning (Bannister et al., 1994).

Social constructionism in psychology developed from second order cybernetics and constructivism (Joubert, 1987). Constructivism is a development emerging from the field of cybernetics in the eighties. This paradigm believes all knowledge to be a construction rather than a reflection or presentation of an objective reality. According to this perspective, one cannot know or observe the truth about people (or other phenomena in the world) in any objective way. Rather, it is assumed that all we can know are our constructions of people and other world phenomena (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). The implication for psychology is a shift away from an observed-system reality, based on the assumption that it is possible to have an objective truth about others and the world, to an observing-system reality, based on the assumption that it is only possible to have a personal construction about others and the world (Hoffman, 1993).

The essence of constructivism can be summarised in the viewpoint that human hypotheses about the world can never directly be proven. The implication is thus that researchers in this paradigm need to acknowledge the active role that they themselves play in the interpretation of any perspective or observation. In line with this paradigm, I kept a journal during the research process which forms part of the data set of the current study.

The idea of self-reflexivity is central to an ecosystemic approach and follows from the idea that people, from within their position as observer, are not “objective” in relation to that which is being observed, but that observers influence the process of observation by their presence and thus forms part of that which is observed. As Rollo May says: “We don’t investigate nature, we investigate the investigator’s relationship

to nature” (May et al., 1958, p.97). The researcher thus becomes co-creator of the context that is researched. My own reflections on the research topic and process form part of this exploration and are discussed later in this chapter. Constructivism does not deny that there exists an objective world outside that of the individual or that one can ever know that world, but rather emphasises that all individuals form part of a broader ecology of relationships and that all human hypotheses about the world are thus based on their relationship with the world.

Social constructionism believes that all knowledge develops in the space between two or more people and questions the idea of an one and only truth. According to Bruner (1991), the existence of a single truth would imply that the world is unchangeably there to be observed. Social constructionism does not view the world as static. “Knowledge, being socially arrived at, changes and renews itself in each moment of interaction” (Hoffman, 1993, p.18). According to Potgieter (1997), all knowledge is culturally and historically relative: “The varied and multiple ways in which knowledge is constructed lends itself to different form of action from the particular society” (p.23). For example, a society which sees traumatisation simplistically and linearly as a weakness of someone being exposed to an traumatic incident would treat members exposed to trauma differently to a society which acknowledges the role of social support in traumatisation.

The effort to try and understand the world within the framework of social constructionism is thus not based on empirical evidence but rather on social processes. The researcher in this domain often encourages the emergence of a number of explanations or stories, rather than defining one single “truth”. As Vance (1989) puts it: “Social construction theory strives for uncertainty through questioning assumptions rather than seeking closure. We need to tolerate ambiguity and fluidity. The future is less closed than we feared, but perhaps more open than we hoped” (p.30).

Constructivism argues that language helps to construct reality and is concerned with broader patterns of social meaning encoded in language (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In keeping with the constructionist perspective, there is agreement that

language does not just convey meaning but in fact is used to construct versions of the social world, that it is through language that experience is interpreted and made understandable (Bowers, 1988; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In simple terms, the principal idea is that we make sense of our lives and our relationships through constructing stories: stories about childhood, our school days, our families, sexual relationships and working experiences. “Through these stories we make ourselves intelligible to self and to others” (De la Rey, 1999, p.78). Ochberg (1994) demonstrates that people live out the events and affairs of their lives in storied form. It is thus suggested that there is no way to disentangle living a life from telling a story. This conception of knowledge production allows for different versions of experience and requires an understanding of the conditions which produce different accounts (Hollway, 1989; Levett, 1988).

The narrative methodology is positioned within the broader context of social constructionism (Baillie & Corrie, 1996; Hamilton, 1995; White, 1995). The data in this study are gathered by means of narrative methods. In recent years numerous writers have advocated a turn toward narrative modes of scholarship in the social sciences (Bochner, 1997; Crites, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 1990; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Sarbin, 1986). As Richardson (1990) suggests, “narrative is the best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their own lives” (p.183). According to Bruner (1991), we organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative - stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. As Hoffman (1993) puts it, “it is becoming increasingly common in talking of social fields of study to use the analogy of a narrative or a text” (p.8). Hamilton (1995, p.29) adds that “the idea of narrative needs to be seen within postmodernist notions of deconstruction, with its conception of the text as a fluid entity with which one can engage playfully, evolving a multitude of new stories”.

Social constructionism maintains that no irrefutable social truth exists, only stories of the world that we tell ourselves and others (Hoffman, 1993). “Narrative ‘truth’ is judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifiability” (Bruner, 1991, p.13).

According to De la Rey (1999), the social constructionist approach holds that narratives do not reflect but rather create what is understood to be true. Bruner (1991) states that the illusion that can be created by a skillful narrative, that a story “is as it is” and needs no interpretation, is produced by two quite different processes. He calls the first “narrative seduction” (Bruner, 1991) and says that great storytellers have the artifices of narrative reality construction so well-mastered that their telling momentarily preempts the possibility of any but a single interpretation, however bizarre it may be. The second route to making a story seem self-evident and not in need of interpretation is via “narrative banalization”. This means that we can take a narrative as so socially conventional, so well known, so in keeping with the canon, that we can assign it to some well-rehearsed and virtually automatic interpretive routine. The effect of trauma on members of the SAPS may thus seem to be so well known that it is virtually automatically interpreted.

Research using qualitative methods has regularly been criticised for not being able to stand the traditional tests of reliability and validity. Responses to this criticism have been varied. In the following section I address issues of reliability and validity in relation to qualitative research.

#### **5.4 The issue of reliability and validity in qualitative research**

Qualitative research has been criticised by persons working from a quantitative research perspective on the grounds that it is subjective, interpretive and not scientifically credible (Bannister et al., 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). However, the criticisms levelled at qualitative research have been viewed mainly as politics within the field of research and not sufficiently substantial to dismiss it as a credible source of knowledge (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Reason, 1994). Qualitative researchers not only challenge the notion of “scientific objectivity” in quantitative methods, but also question how objectivity is defined. According to Ragin (1994), objectivity has also been referred to as an “illusion” because there is nothing from which one can be distant. Marshall (1986) points out that researchers form part of any social situation which they explore and always have attitudes, values, feelings and beliefs about it: “I

do not therefore believe in, or aspire to, objectivity” (Marshall, 1986, p.195). She rather advocates for researchers to acknowledge and explore their stances and value judgements. Banister et al. (1994) expresses the view that rather than making claims about “objectivity”, qualitative research offers a different way of conceptualising the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, that is, reflexivity. From the beginning of this dissertation my own position in relation to the research topic was acknowledged and will be explored and expanded upon later in this chapter.

Smaling (1992) states that it is possible to define objectivity at a higher level of abstraction where paradigms are no longer determinant of the nature of objectivity. He briefly describes this objectivity as “doing justice to the object of study” (Smaling, 1992, p.307). One of the main objectives of this study was to respect participants’ accounts and certainly to aspire to do justice to their experiences. According to Smaling (1992), this may be achieved by designing methods so open that they do justice to the complexity of the object under study. This influenced my choice of narrative essays as a data gathering technique. Objects are not reduced to single variables but are studied in their complexity and entirety in their everyday context (Uwe, 1998).

The issue of reliability and validity has always been a contested and controversial area of debate by empiricists (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Qualitative research transcends rigid formality and objectivity by introducing transparency without comprising the research process, therefore creating possibilities for addressing reliability and validity (Bruinsma & Zwanenberg, 1992). As such, it is possible to overcome and address these assumed “shortcomings” through a process of linking results to other work of similar genres as well as by checking theoretical assumptions (Corradi, 1991; Strebel, 1993). Another possibility for addressing reliability and validity is to assimilate subjective bias into the research process which would contribute to and strengthen the research instead of crippling it (Mama, 1995; Seedat, 1992). Qualitative methods take the researcher’s communication with the field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge production instead of excluding it as far as possible as an intervening variable (Uwe, 1998). The subjectivities of the researcher and of those being studied

are part of the research process and my reflections on the research process are included as such.

According to Bannister et al. (1994), an alternative means of increasing reliability and validity is to keep a reflexive journal where both the experiences of researchers and participants are acknowledged and validated (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Klein, 1983). In addition, a journal serves as a source of cross-checking, guides the process of data gathering and requires researchers to reflect on their interpretation and behaviour while conducting the study.

Marshall (1986) highlights an extremely befitting point on validity:

We need to re-cast the traditional concept of validity to apply it productively to new paradigms ... We certainly need to detain ourselves from any notion that validity tells us 'how true' any piece of research is on anything like an objective scale of truth ... validity instead becomes largely a quality of the knower in relation to his/her data and enhanced by the different vantage points and forms of knowing, it is the personal, relational and contextual (p.197).

Banister et al. (1994) state that completely valid research which represents an ultimate truth is not possible within a qualitative paradigm, which holds that all knowledge is socially constructed. Furthermore, qualitative research recognises a complex and dynamic social world. It involves the researcher's active engagement with participants and acknowledges that understanding is constructed and that multiple realities exist. It is theory-generating, inductive, and aims to gain valid understanding by illuminating the nature and quality of people's experiences. Participants' accounts are valued and emergent issues within the accounts are attended to. The developing theory is thus firmly and richly grounded in personal experiences rather than being a reflection of the researcher's framework. In this way insight, is gained to the meanings people attach to their experiences (Jacobs, 2000).

Debate on different forms of research methods is still going on and features prominently in the literature (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). However, it is refreshing to read that in the social sciences, more innovative, challenging and alternative research paradigms are beginning to emerge, and that their usage is encouraged. It is obvious that researchers' assumptions about the foundations of knowledge will greatly influence the way that they examine knowledge.

The following section deals with the pragmatics of the present research project, namely, the collection of data, the research question, the instruments used and the analysis of data.

## **5.5 Collecting the data: Recruitment procedure and description of the participants**

### **5.5.1 Recruitment procedure**

The participants were recruited from within the South African Police Service. I selected three units. The selection of these units was influenced by practical and logistical factors. The selected units are the Special Task Force, Highway Patrol and the Crime Combatting Unit. Although members from these units are often exposed to traumatic incidents, there are other units that might experience a higher frequency of exposure to trauma or differ in their experiencing of traumatisation. However, this lies outside the scope of the current study.

The Special Task Force (STF) operates nationally and has three major bases: Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. As the name indicates, it is a highly specialised operational unit with the most stringent selection and training procedures (nine months) in the SAPS. Out of the 362 members that were selected for training in 2003, only ten completed the training process successfully (De Beer, 2003). As such, the members are relatively homogenous with regard to their level of functioning. This is an elite unit which is mostly involved in high risk operations and functions in an urban and rural environment. The Special Task Force has a strong in-group identity and the unit is

relatively small or contained with functioning managerial structures in place. There are no operational female members in this unit. Members wear camouflage uniform and their identities are protected. Publishing pictures of members is strongly discouraged.

The Highway Patrol Unit (HP) operates on a provincial level, and members are stationed at Flying Squad centres in different Areas. Highway Patrol forms part of the Police Emergency Services structure, together with, for example, the Radio Control Centres and the Water Wing. The unit is quite visible in their marked BMW motor vehicles. As Kopel (1996) puts it, “the elite Highway Patrol unit is manned by hand-picked, experienced officers ... with high-speed car chases characterizing their daily experiences” (p.23). Members are mostly male, they undergo a selection procedure and are trained in advanced driving skills and survival-weapon-and-tactical training (SWAT). They wear a blue field uniform and a bulletproof vest. The command structure of this unit seems to be more cumbersome and clumsy than the previous unit. The unit is also larger and less contained in a managerial sense.

The Crime Combatting Unit’s main function is aptly described as crime combatting. Until recently the Unit was called Public Order Policing with the primary functions of crowd management, riot control, control of public unrest or disturbances and the control of disaster sites. This Unit is probably historically the most visibly connected with the enforcement of apartheid regulations for its involvement in township unrest. Members are mostly male, they are not selected into the unit and the level of functioning is diverse. Members wear a blue field uniform with a distinctive red name badge. This is, according to the researcher, by far the largest and least managerially contained unit of the three included in the study.

In qualitative research there are no simple sets of guidelines for determining sample size (De la Rey, 1999). The literature on qualitative research methods generally presents decision-making about sample size in terms of a tension between providing an in-depth analysis of the specificities of each case versus skimming over as wide a surface as possible (e.g. Banister et al., 1994). The same applies to narrative studies. Riessman (1993) notes that sample sizes in narrative studies are generally small, and

presents the issue in relation to a tension between generalisation on the one hand, and close attention to narrative detail, on the other. For the current study, five participants were recruited from each unit, making 15 in total. Practical considerations mainly informed the sample size, keeping in mind that police officers do not readily partake in psychological research.

Recruiting the participants turned out to be no easy feat. From previous experience I had learned that police officers are not keen to volunteer for participation in matters concerning mental health research. This is supported by the literature (see previous chapter; Benner, 1982; Bonifacio, 1991; Silva, 1990; and Fay, n.d.). The study further called for “healthy” participants oppose to officers who label themselves or are labelled by others as “traumatised”. This eliminated the option of recruiting members receiving therapy or those in the process of being medically boarded. I informed the commanding officer of each unit about the study (as police protocol requires), and decided to ask him or her to identify five members to participate in the research. This method was chosen because it acknowledges the role of the commander as leader and it proved to be successful in a previous study on organisational stressors in the South African Police Service (mentioned in chapter 4). The commanding officer was also eligible to participate in the study.

Identifying and contacting the three commanding officers proved to be less simple than expected. Only one of the three unit’s commanding officers could be identified immediately. This is partly because of the frequent changes to the organisational structure and the often unclear and clumsy line of command. This factor will be expanded on in the following chapter. The first commander gave his consent for members of his unit to participate in the study, but he did not nominate members and referred the researcher to his operational officer who nominated five members. At the second unit, both the commanding officer and the person second-in-charge were on “stress-leave” and could not be contacted. The person who was temporarily in charge of the unit was situated at another office and was not acquainted with the members. Eventually an operational officer, who is not technically in command of that particular unit but under whose command the members currently function, nominated five

members. The third unit's commanding officer was not sure if he was still in command since he was placed at two different offices and the unit was in the midst of yet another restructuring process. He too referred me to an operational officer for the nomination of members. All of the above people were contacted telephonically. I had first envisaged telephoning the commanding officers in order to set up an appointment at which time I could discuss the study with them in person. Upon hearing about the research, all the commanders felt that the matter could be dealt with telephonically and either referred me to another person, or gave me the names and contact telephone numbers of the members that they nominated to partake in the study. My impression was that the commanders did not have the time for a face-to-face meeting. None of the commanders volunteered to participate in the study themselves.

The only requirements was put to the officers who nominated members was that the nominees must be able to write in either English or Afrikaans and that they had to have been a member of that specific unit for at least five years. The language requirement was included for practical reasons and because the researcher did not want nuances in meaning to be lost in analysis through the translation processes. Fluency in English is a prerequisite for employment in the SAPS and this requirement would therefore not eliminate any possible participants. The time requirement was necessary to ensure enculturation into the unit. This was done in order to allow possible differences that might exist between units' experience of policing to evolve during the analysis of the data. Although it was mentioned to the nominating officers that the research topic was trauma, it was not specifically requested that the nominated members should have been exposed to trauma or not. No race or gender requirements were made. This was done in order to keep the process of nomination as open as possible.

The members who were nominated were contacted individually and asked if they would volunteer to be part of the study. Again it was envisaged at first that I would contact members individually and personally. This process proved to be extremely tedious and cumbersome. Some members were on extended study leave, others were unavailable due to their involvement with clandestine operations and some were

deployed to different provinces. Other participants perform shift duties and were often on rest days, some were on leave or not available, or were reluctant to make an appointment. It eventually happened that most participants were only contacted telephonically. The face-to-face meetings that did take place were at a venue that was convenient for the participants and it so happened that I met with two participants under a tree while they were on duty. Most members that were contacted seemed positive to participate in the research. Of the fifteen members nominated originally, three did not want to participate and three other people were nominated. Two of these were on extended study leave and two other members were nominated in their place. Three of the members who initially indicated that they would participate in the study “disappeared” (did not answer their phones and did not respond to messages) and I could not get hold of them, and so three other members were nominated. It was made clear that participation was voluntary with no consequence for non-participation and that participants’ identity would be withheld. Each participant signed an informed consent form.

<b>INFORMED CONSENT FORM</b>	
I, _____, herewith give my written informed consent to take part in a study on trauma in the South African Police Service. I declare that I participate of my own free will. I understand that I may refuse to be part of the research and that I will not be penalized in any way for not participating. I understand that my identity will be regarded as confidential and that raw data will only be shown to the researcher and the relevant supervisors. The published material will be written in such a way that the identity of individual participants will be impossible.	
_____	Signature
_____	Date

I collected the data personally and it took over seven months to collect it. Participants from the Highway Patrol Unit proved to be the most conscientious in returning their essays while the members of the Crime Combatting Unit were the most difficult to engage.

## **5.5.2 Description of the participants**

Before proceeding to describe the instruments used to gather the data, I will sketch an overall picture of the persons who participated in the study and comment on some aspects of the sample. All 15 participants were male. The age of participants ranged from 27 to 47 years of age, with an average age of 34,1 years. Both White and Black<sup>1</sup> police officers participated in the study. One held the rank of Senior Superintendent, one of Superintendent, two of Captain, eight of Inspector and three of Sergeant. Nine had Afrikaans as mother tongue, three were English speaking and three spoke an African language. Thirteen participants were married and two were single, with only one participant in a second marriage. Fourteen participants had children. Regarding level of schooling, all the participants had passed Grade 12 and eight had a National Diploma in Police Administration. To protect the participants' identities no further information, such as the years of service or religious affiliation, is provided.

## **5.6 The instruments**

With the aim of the study as well as the specific terrain of inquiry in mind, instruments were chosen with the specific aim of optimising the gathering of an exploratory data set. The instruments of data collection are a biographical data form and a written essay or career narrative, as well as my journal. The latter will be discussed in conjunction with my reflections on the research process.

### **5.6.1 Biographical data questionnaire**

This brief questionnaire was designed to elicit information pertaining to age, educational level, marital and employment status, number of children as well as a short description of job functions. I included the question on marital status and whether participants had been married before because the literature indicates that policing

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<sup>1</sup> These terms are in widespread use in present-day South Africa and the meanings of these terms have been shaped by the apartheid history.

places a heavy burden on relationships (Maynard & Maynard, 1980; Parker & Roth, 1973). The biographical data questionnaire was sometimes given to the participants at the first meeting, but because of practical considerations it was mostly faxed to them after the initial telephonic discussion. The rationale for obtaining background information was to contextualise the participants' accounts. The questionnaire was available in English and Afrikaans.

<b>BIOGRAPHICAL DATA FORM</b>	
Name:	_____
Age:	_____
Marital status:	_____
Have you been married before?	_____
Number of children:	_____
Ages of children:	_____
Highest educational level:	_____
First language:	_____
Rank:	_____
Years of service in SAPS:	_____
Present station/unit:	_____
Job title:	_____
Years of services at present station/unit:	_____
Where were you stationed before:	_____
Give a short description of the functions that your job entails:	

### 5.6.2 Career narrative

Each participant was presented with the following request:

“You have worked in the Special Task Force/ Highway Patrol/ Crime Combatting Unit for the last couple of years. In all jobs there are highs and lows, events that are good and those that may cause a lot of stress and trauma. Write an essay in which you explain what you like about your job and that which you do not like about your job. You may comment on changes you experience in your working environment (if any) and how that has impacted

on you. Explain what you think causes the difficulties that you might experience.”

In the current study it was decided to utilise the written language, rather than interviews, since it is a novel way of collecting data in the context of the SAPS<sup>2</sup>. I could find no other research in the SAPS in which this method was used. Practical considerations provided another reason why data was collected through essays rather than interviews. In a period of seven months I only managed to arrange meetings with two participants that lasted for more than twenty minutes. Nine participants were seen for approximately five minutes each and I never met any of the remaining participants<sup>3</sup>. According to Penn and Frankfurt (1994), by adding writing to conversations in research, the discovery of new voices is hastened and thus promotes the creation of new narratives. Writing and speaking are both expressive modes and both set up a reflective process, each influencing the other. The writing, a tangible object as well as a process, serves as an artifact of the relationship between the client and the therapist (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994). In this case, the participants’ relationship with their work becomes the artifact.

Research within this domain often utilise vignettes as a method for data collection (Jacobs, 2000; Levett, 1988; Potgieter, 1997; Strebel, 1993). A vignette is used for participants to project their own experiences, and implies a distancing from the material (Perkel, 1992; Strebel, 1993). According to McNamee and Gergen (1992), telling one’s story is a re-presentation of experience; “it is constructing history in the present” (p.37). According to Bruner (1990), narratives depend on sequential unfoldings across time. Events that have occurred in one time are narrated in another, and written in a third. In each of these time schemes the writer reconstructs and re-experiences these events. By the time something is on paper, it is, indeed, an *invented*

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<sup>2</sup> In hindsight, this decision proved to be useful if one considers the quality and richness of the data collected in this manner.

<sup>3</sup> These face-to-face meetings had as purpose to brief the participants and not to interview them.

narrative. Penn and Frankfurt (1994) state: “We have observed repeatedly that, in the act of writing, meanings that have been ignored or have remained unsaid are invited into the relational field by way of the text” (p.76). According to these authors, writing slows down our perceptions and reactions, making room for their thickening, their gradual layering. The act of writing, like vignettes, thus has an effect of distancing one from the material. For this reason, I decided against the simultaneous use of both.

These essays are personal documents and the use thereof as means of data collection is directed at understanding the human element. This embodies the true spirit of the qualitative approach to the study of human behaviour. Redfield (in Gottschalk et al., 1942) states:

A human or personal document is one in which the human and personal characteristics of somebody who is in some sense the author of the document find expression, so that through its means the reader of the document comes to know the author and his views of events with which the document is concerned (p.vii).

It is important to remember that the essays were written with the researcher in mind and are as such not “private” documents.

The research is focused on one “consequence” of a police member’s career, namely trauma. According to Weiland (1995), career is a construct used by individuals and societies to represent a major segment of experience in the life of a person. Therefore, the very concept of career can be viewed as part of the narrative of self. According to De la Rey (1999), the linking of career with notions of self is certainly not new, as there is a long history of research which has probed the connection between the self-concept and occupation.

## **5.7 My reflections on the research and the process**

The idea of self-referral is central to research that is conducted within a social

constructionist paradigm and as such the researcher's positioning within the research process needs to be addressed. As Riesmann (1993) says, "the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it" (p.v). In view of this, what follows is an account of the way I understand my mark on the research process. In doing this I will describe fragments of myself, my experience and my life. The issues raised through engaging with this question are, in a crucial sense, part of the research.

Several authors have commented on the centrality that reflexivity occupies in the qualitative research process (e.g. Potgieter, 1997; Shefer, 1998; Strebel, 1993). Through reflexivity, researchers acknowledge their role in the construction of knowledge. These authors draw attention to the fact that the reason for reflecting in this manner is not to introduce confounding variables that could constrain the research, thereby negatively influencing the result, but rather to increase the understanding of the context in which the analysis is based. In a similar vein, Meulenberg-Buskens (1997, p.112) asserts that, "qualitative research with its emphasis on the interconnectedness and the holistic nature of the phenomena it studies, calls for an attitude of personal involvement". Furthermore, striving toward quality in qualitative research seems to call for the qualitative researcher "to involve the totality of her being, to acknowledge, accept and use her unique individuality" (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997, p.112). This discussion is based on my experiences and thoughts throughout the research process. It includes paradigmatic decisions and reflections of my feelings during the process.

As was mentioned in chapter one, I have worked as a clinical psychologist in the South African Police Service for several years with my main function being to provide psychotherapy to individual members. As such I continuously experience the organisation's destructive force(s), lack of humane consideration and disregard for members' mental well-being. I often encounter members' severe feelings of helplessness, frustration and sadness regarding their work situation and environment. As a therapist I find myself currently in a position of helplessness and emotional burnout with a limited capacity for empathy. I often find myself in an antagonistic, oppositional position with regard to the organisation. My sympathy and bias lies

mostly on the side of the individual member.

On a more personal level I am married to a functional police officer and share as such in his frustrations and job stressors. We find ourselves in an unique working situation as we form part of the same hostage negotiation team and sometimes attend suicide or hostage scenes together. During my twelve years in the SAPS I have been in various situations that can be defined as traumatic and have often experienced secondary trauma through debriefing sessions and individual or group psychotherapy.

The participants in this research project were all, except one, strangers to me. Our interaction was limited to one or sometimes two brief encounters and I cannot say that a relationship developed between myself and the participants. I believe that this renders the level of disclosure in the essays so much more significant and I wonder about the effect of the in-group/out-group phenomenon that was discussed in chapter two. Does the level of disclosure say something about the researcher being part of the in-group or does it point to a lack of an in-group identity? My experience was that the participants shared experiences mostly with insight, openness and honesty. Some participants even mention names of commanders officers, which might land them in trouble if the facts became known. This, I thought, was done partly to lend more credibility to their stories. They spent much of their own time and went to a great deal of trouble to narrate their stories. I attribute this to a need to be heard. The participants mentioned that this was the first opportunity any of them ever had to tell their stories. They mostly felt ambivalent after completing their stories, stating that it was good to air their stories and get it “out of their systems” but questioned the value of this in changing anything. These feelings of helplessness echoed in my own being and I still question the value of this exercise, other than helping me obtain a PhD degree. Two members mentioned that the process of writing made them angry as they started to think again about things that they mostly try to ignore.

The ambivalence also reverberates in my feelings toward the research process. I felt sad and humbled upon first reading most of the essays. These disclosures must be seen against the backdrop of distrust and persecutory anxiety existing within the

organisation. I found myself in a privileged position and felt quite special because of the trust shown by participants. Then I became angry towards the organisation for “creating” so much hurt, sadness and destructiveness in the lives of members (and their families). What angered me most is the organisation’s apparent disregard of its role in the mental health issues of members. The anger is accompanied by helplessness and a feeling of futility; what will ultimately change in these 15 members’ working environment? I do feel a sense of responsibility; it is as if I owe it to them to make it better after asking them to tell me where it hurts. This holds true even if no such expectations were mentioned during the recruitment phase.

The metaphor of trauma is, according to Levett (1988), a powerful one in the discourses of control. Added to this is the consideration of “who conducts research on whom” which has been raised in the literature (Potgieter, 1997). The issues of power and control are highlighted in such discussions (Bell & Roberts, 1984; Greene, 1994). This consideration also raises the issue of the different spaces occupied by the researcher and the participants. Regarding my position in the present study, I was aware that I am a White woman doing research on White and Black male participants. I am employed under the Police Act and as such am a ranking officer (Superintendent). Professionals were promoted according to a different system than functional members. Thus, although all participants have more years of service in the SAPS than myself, all except two have a lower rank than myself. This, as well as the fact that I am a psychologist, causes a power imbalance with concurrent envy and expectation issues of which I take cognisance. My manner towards the participants was informal and friendly; and I did not use my rank in speaking to them, although my rank was sometimes known. Judging from the level of disclosure it seems as if they trusted me as a researcher and for this I am humbled and grateful. Alternatively, their willingness to participate in the study could be related to the pleasurable experience of talking to an understanding stranger (Dexter, 1970). I was certainly a stranger to the participants, but my connectedness to them through belonging to the same organisation may have been interpreted as my being someone who will understand (and possibly help in some way).

### **5.7.1 Journal**

I kept a personal journal during the time that I started the recruitment phase of participants. Unlike the more “objective” field notes often recommended for quantitative research, this journal represented a recording of my feelings and responses during the process. This was intended to capture some of my reflections on the process, in order to emphasise awareness of the interactional nature of the research method and to facilitate analysis and interpretation of the co-construction process (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strebel, 1993). Bannister et al. (1994) suggest keeping a journal as one way to increase validity.

One of the issues that features prominently in the journal is the confidentiality versus transparency question. Most participants wrote about their thoughts and feelings openly and honestly. They often wrote things that might be considered as being incriminating within the context of the specific organisation and yet they trusted me enough to protect their identity. They did this even though they did not know me, or whether I was indeed trustworthy. I am still not clear about the meaning of this. However, I do wonder about the significance of the whole issue of transparency versus confidentiality in the organisation as such (as discussed in chapter two), and its influence on the level of disclosure of the officers.

Another area of interest in the journal is found in my frustration with regard to the organisational structure and getting hold of commanders and participants.

## **5.8 Analysis of data**

### **5.8.1 Thematic analysis**

This section describes how the data collected from the essays was analysed. Analysis inescapably implies representation. What this means is that analysis is not simply about classifying or categorising data, it is about representing or recounting the experiences

of the others (De la Rey, 1999). The analytic task requires that the researcher singles out some aspects of the data as worthy of note and relegates others to the background (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Again, in keeping with qualitative research, analysis should not be seen as a separate phase that starts only after all the data have been collected; rather, "the different phases shade into each other" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.154).

These data were analysed using a thematic analysis. The primary method selected for analysis was informed by Marshall and Rossman's (1995) non-linear model for analysing qualitative data. This process has been conceptualised as a coherent way of organising material in relation to specific research questions. Within this framework, themes are not predetermined but rather emerge from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These authors caution against using data analysing schemes that "often filter out the unusual, the serendipitous" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.113). Instead, they advance a model that achieves a balance between efficiency and design/analytic flexibility considerations. This model identifies five procedural steps. These are organising data, generating categories, themes and patterns, testing the emergent categories and patterns, searching for alternative explanations and writing the report. However, the authors stated that there is no standard method for analysing qualitative data. Their recommendation is that methodological decisions are based on "choices one makes in a specific research project and reflection on and justification of those choices" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.1). In essence, this means that the most appropriate method is the one which has been designed for a particular study. While following Marshall and Rossman's (1995) recommendations, the methods developed by Charmaz (1995), Ragin (1994), Riley (1990) and Silverman (1993) all proved useful in this study.

**a. Organising the data:** This involved the close and repeated reading of the essays which allowed the researcher to gain a holistic grasp of the data. Strebel (1993, p.87) refers to this process as being "immersed in the data". Riley (1990, p.47) has termed this as the "hear what your data have to say" stage. Throughout the reading and rereading phase, I generated notes regarding ideas related to the text.

**b. Generating categories, themes and patterns:** This phase of analysis involves the identification of salient themes, recurring ideas and patterns which link people and settings together. This required me to question the data and reflect on the conceptual framework upon which the present study had been formulated. The aforementioned analytic exercise was contained within the assumption that there is an interactive participation of personal and social constructions of reality as discussed earlier in this chapter.

The task of generating categories included selecting, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data (Ragin, 1994). In addition, coding categories were developed to assist with this procedure. I closely examined the data for patterns, similarities and differences, and then wrote down words and phrases to represent these themes. Thereafter, the text was reexamined for omissions. Coding categories were developed to assist with the procedure. In this way, meaning could be ascribed to the descriptive information compiled during the study. This process allowed me to explore the relationships and processes within and between categories (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Charmaz (1995) argues that categories should emerge from the data rather than coercing them into preconceived categories. The themes were primarily based on what emerged from the data, but were also influenced by the research questions and the literature on the topic. The coded sections of texts, which included sentences and paragraphs, were grouped together in themes. The categories of coded texts were read several times. This process allowed similarities, differences and contradiction to surface which resulted in subthemes.

### **5.8.2 Analysing the current data set**

Miles and Huberman (1984) warn against data overload when pulling themes. They advocate a balance between being mindful of the conceptual lenses one is training on the data, and still remaining open to perceiving the unexpected. Despite my best attempts, at first count, I generated approximately seventeen themes. These included

the following: discrimination, unfairness, nepotism, uncertainty, the way it was previously compared to the way it is now (the effect of change), racial issues, impact on relationships, belonging to an elite unit, specialised training, the need to feel special, religion, working hours, traumatic incidents, what the work is like, financial implications, views on management, and transfer opportunities. During this stage I became aware of a certain clustering of themes around specific units. It seems as if the different units had different issues that emerged from the data. Other themes seemed to run universally through the data. After an extensive process of refocusing on the aims of the study and the research question, and through a ruthless process of shifting and sorting, these themes were merged into related fields and four major themes emerged. These themes, which will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter, are:

What being a police officer means

Traumatic incidents

Organisational stressors

Transformation

Subsequent to selecting the final themes and mapping their possible interrelationships, quotes were selected. I attempted to select quotes which were representative of the sample and which could best illustrate a particular issue. The quotes are often longer than those normally used in this type of research, but it was the only possible way in which I felt the meanings of what was being voiced could become clear. The participants were assigned letters of the alphabet in order to disguise and protect their identities. The actual essays are not included as the identities of participants might be fairly apparent to those acquainted with them.

After having mapped out a specific theme and its subthemes, I returned to the essays to check that the organisational structure that I had imposed onto the data for the purpose of presenting them, still allowed the participants' voices to be heard. The quotations were translated into English for presentation purposes. The translation was done by an independent source and was counterchecked to enhance textual accuracy.

In reporting the data, I tried on one level to describe the life-world of members of the SAPS in relation to traumatic experiences and the subjective meanings they attached to their experiences. On another level, I tried to make sense of these experiences and meanings by interpreting their latent or metacommunications and looking at these in the light of broader theoretical contexts (mostly psychodynamic), related research and also my own personal experiences of working with police officers. As with all studies of this nature I am aware that my analysis of the text is by no means a definite one and that my making sense of the participants' lived experiences was also tinged by my own subjectivity.

The following chapter describes and discusses the themes that emerged from the study.

## 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

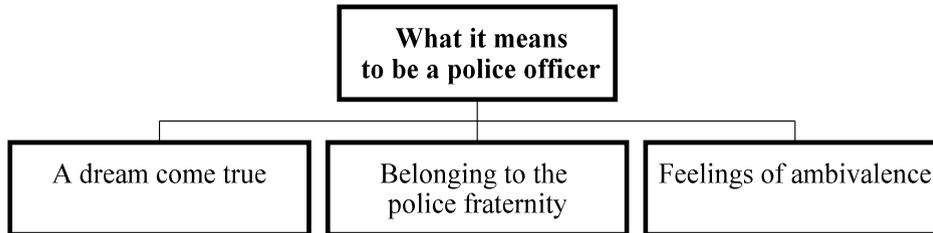
Organisational stressors

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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<sup>8</sup> 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 may 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".

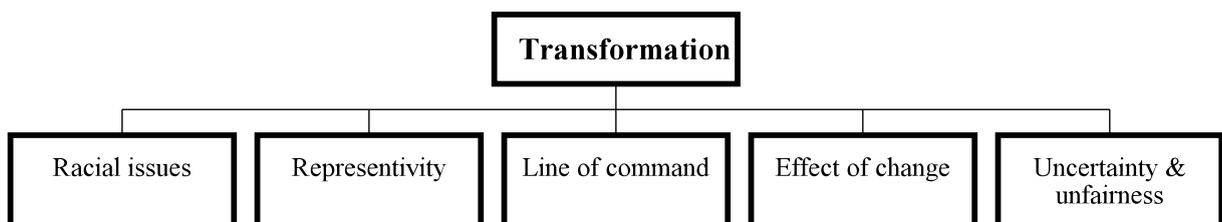
The previous insert alluded to spirituality as a meaningful form of coping and some participants mention religious beliefs as coping mechanisms in traumatic situations.

***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 whom 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.

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