

**The impact of trauma debriefing on debriefers in the context of the
South African Police Service (SAPS) Helping Professions, Limpopo
Province**

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the mini-dissertation submitted for the Masters degree in Employee Assistance Programmes to the University of Pretoria has not been formerly submitted to another University, is my own work in design and execution and that all the reference materials contained herein have been duly acknowledged.

Nozimanga Minah JONAS

Signature:_____

University of Pretoria, PRETORIA

DEDICATIONS

This piece of work is genuinely dedicated to myself, for the hard work and efforts I had to invest in order to see myself through.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanksgivings are awarded to all the individuals who helped me to put together this piece of work:

- My indebtedness is due to my study leader (Dr. F. M. Taute), for believing in my potential and constantly encouraged me to fight through at difficult times. Her skill, enthusiasm, and relentless determination are just a few of the many assets that make her the best.
- I thank all the debriefers in the South African Police Service for their support in helping with relevant data.
- As I write these acknowledgements I struggle to find a way to thank Mr Kaizer Phalanndwa for the key role he played in editing this piece of work.
- At the risk of leaving even one person out, I am very lucky to have a supportive family, my nephew Joseph Seabo in particular, who love me unconditionally and support my work with passion, especially on those days when I let go.
- As I am writing these acknowledgements, I struggle to find a way to thank myself for the unswerving patience and lots of financial sacrifices that I had to invest in completing this piece of work.
- And finally, I thank God - the Devine force that guides my life.

ABSTRACT

Trauma debriefing is a session or meeting that includes the affected individuals and the trained debriefer who facilitates the session. Debriefing is thus, a process whereby the victims of any traumatic events ventilate their experiences in a safe environment with a view to striving towards a normal state of equilibrium.

In the milieu of the South African Police Service, the trauma debriefing process is used as a support mechanism to all its members as they are constantly exposed to traumatic events. The ultimate goal of debriefing is to assist the victimised to unblock their feelings.

The researcher has to a large extent become motivated to undertake the study as a result of her practical and professional experience in the field of trauma debriefing. Since working as a trauma debriefer for five years in the Police Services, the researcher has been triggered by the fact that trauma debriefing is concentrated on the victims of trauma only, whereas the help providers are never afforded an opportunity to be supported.

Much of the researcher's daily work is to attend to members of the service who have been exposed to traumatic situations. This exposition has made the researcher to be primarily interested in interpersonal relationships that have become more and more of secondary traumatisation and burnout in professionals working with other individuals' trauma.

In her undertaking of the study, the researcher followed a qualitative approach to enhance her to execute the task of collecting data. The basis of the qualitative approach was to assist the researcher to accumulate the experiences of the respondents from their own perspectives. To achieve this objective, the researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule as a tool to encourage nine respondents to offer their reflections about the impact trauma work has on them.

In the context of the undertaken study, applied research was pursued with a view to put into perspective the respondents' experiences from their own account. The researcher had chosen applied research with a view that the findings thereof would contribute in addressing the immediate challenges facing the debriefers in their own work environments.

The goal pursued in this exploratory-descriptive study was an exploration of a relatively unknown area. This study was geared towards gaining new insight into what the impact of trauma debriefing was on debriefers. Therefore, the main idea of this study was to explore and describe only.

Realising that not much has been written on the impact of trauma debriefing on debriefers, the researcher modified the approach so that emphasis is placed on exploration and description of the debriefers' experiences. Hence, a combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs was employed.

An extensive literature review on the process of trauma debriefing and the impact of trauma debriefing was done.

Extracts from the in-depth interviews revealed that the ripple effect of trauma debriefing on debriefers is three fold, namely:

- Psychological impact - where it was discovered that trauma workers tend to experience flashbacks, loss of identity which can be attributed to trauma workers identifying themselves with the survivors they debrief, susceptibility to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of overexposure to secondary trauma and forgetfulness.
- Emotional impact - where it was found that elements such as losing touch with oneself, emptiness and hopelessness, typical stress, disconnection from significant others, strong negative feelings and agitation are obvious characteristics of what trauma debriefing can do to trauma workers.
- Physical impact - which it has been found, characterises the tiredness, headaches, and post traumatic stress experienced more often by trauma

debriefers. On the contrary, some debriefers valued the experiences from their work exposure as energising pleasure and tolerance, and something that gave them a sense of control and fulfilment.

The eventual outcomes of the study revealed that trauma has far reaching impact on debriefers, and thus has to be seen as caring cost to organisations such as the South African Police Service.

KEY CONCEPTS

Debriefing

Debriefer

Trauma

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