

QUALITATIVE
RESEARCH REPORT

From Strength to Strength: Furthering NSW Police well-being



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1. Executive Summary

We're now a very professional organisation. I've seen it develop over the last 16 years. I like the work that the organisation's doing on leadership at all supervisory levels and even down to the constables.

Policing is complex and difficult work. The NSW Police Force (NSWPF) is investing in research to help improve the well-being of police officers and enhance their resilience to stress and trauma. This research applies positive psychology to policing by identifying the issues that are most important to NSWPF staff while also identifying current organisational strengths that can be built upon to foster an environment that further enhances the well-being of employees of the NSWPF.

There is a positive revolution sweeping psychology that shifts the emphasis from psychological illness towards principles and practices for enabling human flourishing, even in the face of adversity (Schueller, 2012). Capitalising upon a positive psychology lens and applying it to policing enables a fresh, strengths-based approach on which to generate research-derived strategies to maximise the social, emotional, and physical well-being of employees of the NSWPF. However to date, there is a paucity of research that capitalises on recent advances in positive psychology theory and research (Marsh & Craven, 2006) and it has yet to be utilised in a policing setting.

The research described in this report involved in depth interviews with 40 participants (26 males and 14 females) at varying levels of experience, rank, and age. Participants were drawn from 6 Local Command Areas (LAC's) identified by the NSWPF: Three from 'urban' LACs within the Sydney metropolitan area and three from regional/rural areas. In addition, the research was further informed by an open-ended survey question completed by 338 officers (out of 1090 total respondents) across these commands. The pilot survey and the interviews were conducted in 2014. The production of this report was postponed during a period when IPPE moved from the University of Western Sydney to the Australian Catholic University, and was recommenced in 2015.

The interview and survey questions sampled officer motivations for joining and staying in the NSWPF, reasons for leaving, events or causes leading to problems with staff well-being, coping mechanisms and protective factors used by police officers, positive and negative aspects of 'command' and the organisation, and suggested solutions and recommendations for improving NSWPF employee well-being.

Since the conclusion of the data collection phase of this research, NSWPF have independently continued to develop and implement initiatives to improve the well-being of staff including: a) the Workforce Improvement Program, b) the use of Dr Gilmartin's book and lectures during training (Key Recommendation 3.1), and, c) the development of an eWell-Check app due for release in 2016. The research team acknowledges this excellent work. **However, rather than seek to outline and comment on this additional work, to avoid confusion we decided to constrain this report to commenting on issues as they stood in 2014 when data collection for this research concluded. In this sense, some of the recommendations may refer to work that is already under way.**

The researchers recognise that in 2012, the Government substantially focused on strategic improvements in the structures and processes supporting the insurance arrangements for police officers and NSWPF focused on the associated cultural change and injury management, prevention and early intervention strategies to accompany these changes. This resulted in the NSW Government approving a package of \$17 million in funding to support education, training, research, improvement projects and cultural change initiatives. It was just prior to this time that this research commenced, and as such the organisation during the life of the research has experienced substantial cultural change and improvement. In 2016, the Auditor General has commented positively on the delivery of these improvements in injury prevention, management and early intervention strategies. This investment in officers has seen a change in focus for the organisation and a changed *injury management, prevention and early intervention landscape for NSWPF*.

The research to be conducted within the ARC Linkage project will again involve qualitative interviews with staff and a quantitative survey which includes an open-ended qualitative question and will be deployed to all NSWPF staff. The data from this additional research may include information that could inform measurement of the impact of initiatives implemented by NSWPF in the two years since this pilot qualitative research was conducted.

Our recommendations are described throughout the report and are summarised in the next brief section. The recommendations are in seven groups:

A. REPLICATING POSITIVE COMMAND CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

How can the NSWPF build upon commands that are working well to enhance leadership, management, conflict handling, and communication across the organisation?

B. FURTHER STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR INJURED OFFICERS

What key strategies might be employed to enhance the degree to which injured officers: a) feel supported by the NSWPF and b) can be successfully reintegrated into the police force?

C. ENHANCING RECRUITMENT AND EARLY CAREER TRAINING

How can recruitment and early career training best support officers in obtaining a realistic but hopeful image of possible career paths in policing, and how can the transition into policing be best managed to alleviate/reduce the risks of trauma and early burnout?

D. PROMOTING PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

What practical steps might help to enhance officer physical well-being?

E. PROMOTING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

How can the latest advances in psychotherapy and positive organisational psychology be used to enhance resilience in the face of emotionally challenging work?

F. MANAGING WORKLOAD TO SUPPORT WELL-BEING

What systems such as workload allocation, shifts, transfer, mobility, and job rotation might best support staff well-being and performance?

G. REFINING PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

How can the processes of gathering staff opinions, promotion, feedback, reporting, complaints, and internal investigations be optimised to enhance officers' well-being while still meeting organisational needs?

The findings from this initial, exploratory research provide a strong basis for the larger, collaborative research project supported by the Australian Research Council under the ARC Linkage Program, commencing in 2016 and concluding in 2018, and for an ongoing dialogue between university and NSWPF collaborating research partners. The extensive work already undertaken by the NSWPF has

already been acknowledged. This research is focused upon officer feedback and it is hoped the research results will not only reflect on the work already being undertaken, but also provide new perspectives which can be built upon for the future.

2. Key Recommendations

A. REPLICATING POSITIVE COMMAND CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Recommendation A.1: Investigate and identify the key success factors enabling exemplary commands to support NSWPF staff autonomy, positive relationships, competence and resilience, whilst at the same time decrying bullying behaviour and use this knowledge to develop training resources to enable all commands to replicate these successful strategies more broadly to enhance a supportive culture of workplace well-being.

Recommendation A.2: Enhanced mental health first aid training for supervisors would enable them to identify personnel exhibiting signs of excessive stress and recommend or enact the appropriate course of action.

Recommendation A.3: That a comprehensive program of 360 degree feedback be provided as part of leadership training in order to both enhance leadership capability but also engender a less “top-down” approach to leadership. Such upwards feedback has often been shown to be one of the most powerful influences upon developing a more transformational/coaching style of leadership (Alexander & Hardy, 2014).

Recommendation A.4: The NSWPF could aim to provide leadership training that is delivered to all ranks and that focuses, to varying degrees depending on rank, on the three innate or fundamental psychological needs for: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (see Chapter 1). Research consistently shows that failing to satisfy these needs results invariably in negative functional consequences for mental health and poor persistence and performance (e.g. Chen et al., 2014).

For supervisory staff, such training could use the strengths-based research approaches listed in Recommendation 1 to emphasise key themes of prosocial team building and conflict resolution, listening and communication, coaching skills, reinforcement of discipline and professionalism, empowering staff, engaging with the frontline, and mentoring junior staff.

Recommendation A.5: Research participants suggested it would be beneficial to provide additional training to sergeants, particularly those who directly manage the 'troops' in management concepts to allow staff more autonomy to work freely towards their work objectives rather than becoming at risk of being process focused and needing to micro-manage.

Recommendation A.6: Feedback from the initial data indicates a need to review the promotion system to ensure that it is effective and that staff are given realistic expectations for promotion.

B. FURTHER STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR INJURED OFFICERS

Recommendation B.1: Participants strongly felt that injured officers need to be better supported by the organisation, colleagues, and supervisors. Research suggests, and we would recommend, that the NSWPF continue to further develop strong support mechanisms and established return to work plans, with achievable goals, to enable injured officers to successfully come back to work and re-join their teams.

Recommendation B.2: Early intervention and immediate post-traumatic incident follow-up (debriefing) built into management procedures to ensure effective monitoring of frontline police well-being supports well-being and prevents the exacerbation of psychological problems. Existing early intervention strategies could be further supported by taking measures ensures commands adhere more strictly to the welfare policy and are more vigilant monitoring staff exposure to traumatic incidents.

For example participants suggested involvement in traumatic incidents and debriefings should be mandatorily recorded by Commanders to become part of the effective monitoring of front-line police well-being.

Recommendation B.3: Given that the NSWPF, with the support of the NSW government, has invested significantly in programs to promote well-being and improve injury management and rehabilitation, it is recommended that an analysis be undertaken of the workforce to determine whether or not the 12% of police who were found to be unable to be deployed in 2011 has increased or decreased.

C. ENHANCING RECRUITMENT AND EARLY CAREER TRAINING

Recommendation C.1: To prepare for the emotional upheavals that inevitably occur on the job, the book 'Emotional survival for law enforcement: A guide for officers and their families' (Gilmartin, 2002) should continue to be distributed to all new recruits. Gilmartin's work aims to help officers and their families maintain and/or improve their quality of life both personally and professionally, and advocates utilising psychological awareness and mindfulness as protective measures against emotional distress. This makes it an invaluable resource. Additionally, allowing time within commands to watch live pod or webcasts of Gilmartin's seminars (regularly organised jointly by NSWPF and PANSW) should be further encouraged. Although the NSWPF has made the relevant media widely available to staff, more could be done to direct and encourage staff to view these broadcasts. The aim should be to generate discussion, and for the advice provided in the broadcasts to be reinforced regularly, and to reach as many staff as possible, particularly those in remote areas.

Recommendation C.2: Research participants suggested that current NSWPF recruitment advertising needs to be refined to provide a more *accurate* image of the nature of tasks undertaken and the skills required to perform the role of a NSW Police Officer rather than enticing potential recruits with 'feel good' promotional materials.

Recommendation C.3: Participants indicated that, while at the academy, recruits need to be trained on strategies to enable their well-being and allow them to be better prepared for the amount of trauma they will witness, the high administrative workload, the realistic nature of the judicial system, and the impact policing can have on managing their personal relationships. Such training at the Academy would be optimal, and resilience training should continue as soon as practical within the probationary period.

Recommendation C.4: The research suggested it would be beneficial to provide additional training for new recruits and first year constables, to provide skills to resolve interpersonal conflict, which may assist in reducing the attrition rate in the first five years of employment.

Recommendation C.5: Research participants indicated a belief that, over the past two years programs have been implemented by NSWPF to help staff deal with stress, however, the interview data indicated a belief that this is only for the ranks of Sergeant and above. More could be done to promote resilience training, especially with new recruits.

Recommendation C.6: Consideration may be given to developing strategies for providing ongoing additional support to recruits commencing employment in regional and rural areas. This may include assisting in finding accommodation as well as improved support programs to assist with assimilating into a new community whilst still studying.

D. PROMOTING PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Recommendation D.1: The benefits of physical fitness could be more widely promoted. The use of positive computing applications could be investigated (Calvo & Peters, 2014) to assist staff maintain fitness, and yearly fitness assessments may be advisable to ensure fitness is maintained.

Recommendation D.2: Management could give consideration to more systematic encouragement of physical activities. Potential strategies could include gyms with physical training instructors at the workplace, subsidies for gym memberships, rostered exercise, support for officers competing in sporting/fitness events (e.g., triathlons), and the establishment of inter-command physical fitness competitions.

E. PROMOTING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Recommendation E.1: Building on research advances and new successful strategies being employed by NSWPF, resources may be created to train officers to develop well-being and resilience including consideration of developing positive computing apps, in consultation with end-users that encourage and prompt regular and ongoing well-being activities electronically.

Recommendation E.2: Current management practices could be built upon to provide a more systematic and extended use of strategies to share the psychological load of 'traumatic' incidents among police officers. This could include continued enhancement of the 'welfare register' used in some commands to identify officers who have gone through similar traumatic incidents to provide support to other officers.

Recommendation E.3: More frequent rotation of those dealing with crimes against children should also be considered and placements made with sensitive consideration of previous experiences (e.g., not transferring personnel to roles where they will still be subject to the same kind of stressors). It is acknowledged that such transfers may contribute to a loss of expertise but the research indicates that the long-term physical and psychological benefits of providing staff with regular respite from these units will outweigh the temporary costs.

Recommendation E.4: Police officers expressed a reluctance to utilise the internal EAP services, due to a perceived lack of quality and a concern for lack of confidentiality. It is recommended that NSWPF promote the professionalism and confidential nature of the service and offer staff access to independent and confidential psychological counselling of their choice.

F. MANAGING WORKLOAD TO SUPPORT WELL-BEING

Recommendation F.1: Research participants requested a review of the Flexible Rostering Guidelines to reinforce the best aspects of the Guidelines and to remove those which are perceived as detrimental to well-being. Perhaps a survey of all officers as to what they required could inform preparation of new guidelines.

Recommendation F.2: Research indicates that the 'block' and 'non-block' 12-hour shift workplace practices could benefit from review in order to ensure frontline police safety and productivity on duty.

Recommendation F.3: Research participants recommended better transfer and mobility guidelines to meet changing demands across LACs. There should be the ability to recognise that some commands are 'high volume' at all times or at particular times and require extra police to meet demands. There should be the ability to temporarily rotate officers to meet high demand periods at LACs.

Recommendation F.4: Further to recommendation 6.3; given that understaffing at the frontline gives rise to 'exponential' problems such as high workload and stress, the introduction of a 'relieving cells' concept may alleviate the occurrence of additional staff burnout. A comparison of the costs associated with such relieving cells against the exponential nature of staff burnout may be a worthwhile exercise.

Recommendation F.5: Further to recommendation 6.2, research participants requested that, where possible, the NSWPF introduce more flexible rostering practices with earlier notices of the shift cycle,

which may allow police officers to satisfy their personal responsibilities and maintain a more stable work-life balance.

G. REFINING PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Recommendation G.1: Participants in the study emphasised the need for the NSWPF and insurance companies to work to strict guidelines in relation to dealing with injured officers, including the administration of follow-up investigations and surveillance programs. In this regard, there is a need to ensure a cohesive and unified approach, including effective communication with injured employees, by the NSWPF, EAP, and insurer – focusing upon a more individually orientated service. Failure to do this is a factor which exacerbates psychological injuries. There is a need to continue to reduce the stigmatisation of stress related injuries, ensuring that the workplace provides a respectful and caring environment.

Recommendation G.2: NSWPF management practices include strategies to appropriately deploy restricted duties staff so that they can be included in the team, and can see and feel that they are making a significant contribution. Taking into account officer safety requirements and the impact of ALERT, this could include attending incidents after first response police to collect information, update reports, and take statements to work as an integral team member.

Recommendation G.3: Further exploration is needed into ways to reduce the amount of paperwork and ‘double and triple ups’ in reporting (e.g., notebook reports, computer reports, SITREPS, and other reports all outlining the same thing).

Recommendation G.4: To ensure fairness, investigation of internal complaints could be better conducted by independent officers rather than officers who work with the subject of the complaint.

Recommendation G.5: Participants felt strongly that the time taken to investigate internal complaints needs to be reduced dramatically.

Recommendation G.6: Participants who were, or had been, under investigation stated that they needed to be regularly informed on the progress of the investigation and given the benefit of the doubt by co-workers. Police officers may suffer from less stress if they are given a reasonable amount of information about the investigation and not assumed guilty until being proven innocent.

Recommendation G.7: All responses relating to the EAP stressed that it needs to strive to develop and deliver a more comprehensive, high quality, and confidential service that is valued by NSWPF staff.

3. The Research

We see record numbers of officers leaving the NSW Police Force with significant work related injuries, which continue to disable them post-employment and prevent them from ever working in a meaningful way...a fresh approach needs to be considered. (PANSW, 2011)

Over the last decade, the NSW Police Force (NSWPF) has become increasingly concerned that record numbers of their employees take extended medical leave or exit the police force due to psychological stress and trauma. Research has shown that over 80% of those taking medical leave do so primarily for psychological reasons, and at least 80% of that number will experience partial or permanent injury and medical discharge from the police force (PANSW, 2011). The vast majority of personnel (98.4%) exit the NSWPF via medical leave, primarily due to PTSD (NSWPF, 2011). In addition, research by PANSW and the Safety Command found that more than 70% of all claims relate to 'internal issues', including interpersonal conflict and poor human resource management (PANSW, 2011). A significant proportion of new recruits leave within the first five years of service, presenting concerns for the retention of a new generation of police officers. On any given day, an average of 12% of the workforce is unable to be deployed (NSWPF, 2011). Since 2011 and the change to the NSWPF 'Blue Ribbon' Death and Disability Scheme, less persons have disengaged from the Police Force.

There is a belief amongst police officers that there has been a significant increase in officers suffering from psychological and other injuries who remain within the organisation. This places great stress on the organisation to find non-operational positions for those who are injured or ill for a long period of time, or those who are medically found to have reached 'Maximum Medical Improvement' (MMI). Following a review of the organisation by former Assistant Commissioner Peter Parsons in 2011, the New South Wales Government accepted a recommendation that each operational Command maintain 90% of staff who are able to be deployed to operational duties. Again, anecdotal evidence indicates that, due to increases in officers suffering illness and injuries remaining within the organisation, in many Commands that operational level is not currently being achieved. Further study is needed in respect of this phenomenon. It is important to either confirm there is a continuing problem, or to dispel this belief amongst police if it is incorrect.

As noted above, internal issues such as interpersonal conflict are a significant factor in medical leave claims. As NSWPF has acknowledged, this creates an opportunity for improvement as stressors that arise from policy/practice within the organisation can be addressed through organisational approaches that support positive psychological empowerment and autonomy, as defined within Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (see page 13).

The Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE) at the Australian Catholic University was approached to conduct a pilot research study within the NSWPF with a view to identifying and addressing key factors affecting police well-being, commitment, and retention. IPPE has an established reputation as a world-class research centre that is internationally recognised for: substantive and methodological advances in positive psychology, well-being, resilience, self-determination and self-concept research, advanced quantitative analysis, developing psychometrically sound measures of important psychosocial outcomes (e.g. self-concept, motivation, engagement, positive psychology constructs), and advanced computational statistics. This project builds on IPPE's track record of successful ongoing collaboration with high-profile university partners nationally and internationally, including Oxford University, Cambridge University, and the University of Rochester, New York - as well as partners such as the well-being Institute, The International Positive Psychology Association, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, and other international research centres specialising in organisational psychology, motivation, and personality development.

The purpose of the pilot study was twofold:

- Identify factors that affect well-being, commitment, and retention by asking employees questions about their attitude to their work, their satisfaction with what they do and their capacity to do it, recognition for their work and their motivations to join, stay or leave the organisation.
- Investigate the role of the organisational climate by asking questions about their command culture, managerial practices, team cohesiveness, interpersonal conflict, work flexibility, job overload, and the availability of support and resources that foster well-being and job commitment.

In order to address the above, quantitative research in the form of an online questionnaire and qualitative research in the form of targeted interviews were conducted. The details of these are outlined in Chapter 2: Methodology.

The key elements of our positive psychology approach and its application to this particular research with the NSWPF are outlined below.

3.1. FACTORS

3.1.1 RESILIENCE

I don't know there's anything an organisation can do to combat the trauma the police are exposed to. It's just the way it is. Everybody operates different, it's different for everybody but I still remember cutting down the dead bodies, dead babies, horrific car accidents. They're all just sitting there. I remember them clear as anything.

Individual resilience is a key psychological strength that emphasises capacity to function optimally under normative and acute stress, find opportunities in tragedy, bounce back from setbacks, and turn adversity to advantage (Martin & Marsh, 2006; 2009; Parker & Martin, 2009; 2011; Parker et al., 2012; Rutter, 1987). Inherent in our approach to resilience is a strengths-based approach to responses to adversity (e.g. Atkins, 2008).

In their everyday roles police officers are the first responders to dangerous, traumatic, and stressful situations. They are routinely exposed to cumulative stress (e.g., constant risk, public dissatisfaction) and critical traumatic incidents (e.g., violent crimes, deaths, crimes against children). As such, policing is unique in that it involves situations that are likely inconceivable to others and thus represents one of the most emotionally challenging occupations (Birch & Herrington, 2011; Hart & Cotton, 2003). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) rates are 4-6 times higher amongst police officers than the general public (Green, 2004) and police officers are exposed to more everyday workplace stressors (e.g., changes, conflicts, job overload) than most other occupations (Mayhew, 2001).

However, research shows that stress is not experienced in the same way for all individuals even when they have experienced similar traumatic events. Our research is centred on the psychological 'protective factors' that make an individual more resilient or able to process their experiences in a way that minimises their risk of serious psychological harm, and the factors that can help an individual develop such psychological strength.

Psychological empowerment is generally considered as a key psychological strength for employees that reflects whether an individual is motivated and feels able to contribute actively in his/her work role (Spreitzer, 1995; 2008), and is a core indicator of person-job adjustment (Vardi, 2000). Empowerment is also key to effective leadership in modern organisations (Atkins, 2011). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 2000), a person's sense of relatedness (whether they find attachment to those at work and find their job meaningful), competence (whether they feel they have the skills and abilities to perform their job successfully), and autonomy (whether they feel they work in

an 'autonomy supportive' environment and can make decisions on how to perform their role), are associated with psychological well-being. In the context of the roles of NSW Police Force staff it is important to clarify the specific meaning of 'autonomy' as used in this research. "According to the SDT formulation, a person is autonomous when his or her behaviour is experienced as willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses the actions in which he or she is engaged and/or the values expressed by them." (Chirkov et al., 2003, p. 98). In practice, this means that NSWPF personnel can fully and willingly endorse following the rules outlined by the NSWPF and the commands of superior officers while also operating autonomously. That is, have officers be intrinsically motivated to follow orders (i.e. they will follow orders because they believe it is in the best interests of the force and because they value being a high functioning team member). What has been shown to be critical for wellbeing is that people perform best when they act in line with their personal values and beliefs. "When autonomous, a person feels initiative and stands behind what he or she does." (Chirkov et al., 2003, p. 98). The three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy, if satisfied, can contribute to an employee's sense of empowerment and positive adjustment to their job. The protective role of psychological empowerment in relation to work stressors has also recently been validated by Boudrias, Morin, and Brodeur (2012).

In particular, research suggests that individual characteristics, psychological strengths and resources, and positive psychology factors like self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-belief act as 'buffers' against stress in demanding occupations, which leads to more positive long-term outcomes for employees (Dicke et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2012). In that police work is a highly demanding occupation, the assessment of psychological empowerment among NSWPF employees was a key component of the present study.

Positive psychology theory and research shows that individuals can learn to be more resilient through the development of psychological strengths. This research also extends to include social resilience (Cacioppo et al., 2011). Hence the present research assessed resilience at the individual level and at the NSWPF command-level to clarify personal and command characteristics that facilitate resilience.

3.1.2 OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Occupational stress can result in harm to physical and mental health, and contribute to job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, loss of productivity, and turnover (Brunborg, 2008). Thus, the organisational factors contributing to occupational stress for police officers have direct relevance to the questions the present study sought to address. In terms of organisational psychology theory, the job demand-control model (JDC, Karasek, 1979) and job strain model (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999) identify two crucial job aspects that contribute to organisational stress. *Job demands* are primarily defined as perceived workload and *job control* refers to the freedom employees perceive they have in deciding how to meet these demands. Research shows that employees working in high demand jobs with low control over their decisions experience the lowest occupational health and well-being (Karasek, 1979). Subsequent research has added a social support component to the job demand-control model (JDC-S) where *social support* refers to supportive and helpful social interactions within the organisation (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). In JDC-S, social support moderates job stress.

JDC-S is widely used in occupational stress research (e.g., Toker & Biron, 2012), but is limited primarily to job characteristics (e.g., control & demands) and stable employee characteristics (e.g., gender, personality), rather than individual characteristics such as psychological resilience. Alternative models such as the Job Demands Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2003) and the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001) suggest that strain is not experienced in the same way for all individuals, even those facing similar demands. This suggests that there are individual characteristics which moderate the effect of stressors on a person's experience of strain. Hence, it is critical to identify and then build upon the organisational factors that best help police officers develop these individual characteristics that help them cope with the inherently stressful nature of their job. By doing so, NSWPF can actively bolster officers' psychological strengths to improve their overall

well-being, increase retention rates, and increase the numbers of police retained by the organisation who are fit to be deployed to full operational duties (Seligman & Fowler, 2011).

There is little control over police officers' exposure to acute stressors that arise in the execution of their duty. **However, we can endeavour to identify the organisational factors that help them develop characteristics that enable them to become more resilient and that empower them to have sufficient autonomy at work, find the job meaningful, feel supported and respected by the organisation and their colleagues, and believe that they actively contribute and have an impact both as police officers and employees of the NSWPF.**

3.1.3 WORKPLACE COMMITMENT AND MOTIVATION

Empirical work on Australian policing has established that commitment levels among police officers are comparatively low by international standards (Beck, 1996). Given that commitment is, in part, under the control of the organisation (Meyer et al., 2004; Meyer et al., 2002), commitment was specifically targeted in the current research. Commitment is recognised as a powerful positive motivational force (Meyer et al., 2004). Meyer et al. (2002) distinguished three mindsets related to commitment:

- Affective – positive emotional attachment;
- Continuance – attachment because of the perceived high costs of leaving; and
- Normative – attachment due to feelings of obligation, loyalty, and duty.

All three mindsets are negatively correlated with plans to leave the job, with the affective mindset having the strongest correlation with positive outcomes (e.g., retention, performance, satisfaction).

Research has also established that employees' commitment involves multiple foci (e.g., colleagues, supervisors; Morin et al., 2009; Morin et al., 2011) and that these additional foci can be even better predictors of intentions to leave or stay. Furthermore, a recent review by Meyer and Maltin (2010) supports the fact that affective commitment to multiple foci represents a strong predictor of well-being, as well as an important protective factor against the effects of work related stressors. Conversely, over-commitment carries risks in terms of performance, burnout, health, and risk-taking behaviours (Janzen et al., 2007; Morin et al., 2013). This observation suggests that over-committed employees may have too few sources of individual self-worth (e.g., their sense of self-worth is attached exclusively to their job), leading them to over invest in specific life areas to the detriment of others.

Both psychological empowerment and commitment are recognised as very powerful psychological strengths, important motivational forces in the workplace (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Meyer et al., 2004), and powerful drivers of efficacy, retention, and well-being (e.g. Meyer & Maltin, 2010; Seibert et al., 2011). Dominant theories of motivation have long recognised that motivation does not only depend on the value attributed to a task or occupation (interest, usefulness, cost; e.g., Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000), but also on self-beliefs regarding the ability to successfully achieve one's work (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Nagengast & Marsh, 2012). Central to the motivational component of workplace commitment (Meyer et al., 2006) are also the components of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; 2008): self-belief, self-efficacy, perceptions of competence, expectations of success and multiple dimensions of self-concept (Marsh & Craven, 2006).

3.2. STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH

This research successfully combined an established multi-disciplinary team with international experts in commitment, well-being, and motivation to uncover key organisational and individual factors that help retain psychologically healthy and resilient police officers. The potential rewards for identifying these factors extend to the NSWPF, tax payers, and the public whom officers protect and serve. This research has built upon the paucity of existing literature into well-being of police, and hopes to contribute to empirically driven (evidence-based) police policy and practice formulation and implementation.

Throughout the research, it was encouraging to see the willingness of volunteers to participate and provide in-depth answers to focus area questions, with the majority of interviews continuing beyond the anticipated timeframe. The willingness of staff to talk so frankly with researchers may highlight a lack of alternative trusted outlets, with some commenting, “*I’ve never spoken to anyone about this before.*” This point also addresses one of the main criticisms of this research voiced by some of the senior staff who argued that they already know what the problems are from reading Workcover incident reports by police officers applying for medical leave due to work-related psychological or physical injury. There are a number of advantages of this research over such Workcover documentation. Workcover applications are motivated by the need to secure medical leave and therefore may be missing important information on the wider context; in contrast to Workcover documentation, this research offered anonymity/immunity allowing participants to speak freely. Missing contextual data on Workcover documentation may allow the deflection from scrutiny of organisational and management factors that impact well-being and which may underpin or exacerbate psychological injury. **Under the conditions of anonymity, participants were able to discuss the organisational context of their well-being candidly, and this environment has succeeded in yielding rich and meaningful data that can be used to further police well-being.**

3.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

It is important to note that it is the impression of the interviewer/s that some issues were more sensitive for participants and thus might be substantially under-reported, particularly around the impact of personal and family well-being due to alcohol abuse and other conflict at home. It should also be noted that although the interview sample was purposefully selected and the proportion of male to females and range of ranks was broadly representative of the whole force (with the exception of unsworn staff, who were underrepresented), the findings may not be representative of all commands.

4. Methodology

Although seldom incorporated into organisational psychology (but see Dicke et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 2006; Parker et al., 2012), positive self-beliefs are at the heart of positive psychology (Marsh & Craven, 2006), and thus central to this study with the NSWPF. Multidimensional self-concepts are a powerful component of well-being, fundamental to successfully coping with adversity and have been demonstrated by a body of international research “...to impact on a wide range of critical well-being outcomes and serve as an influential platform for enabling full human potential” (Craven & Marsh, 2008, p. 104).

Overarching objectives of this research were to:

- Identify factors that affect well-being, commitment, and retention using models such as Psychological Empowerment, Motivational Framework of Commitment (Meyer et al., 2006), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 2000); and
- Investigate the role of the organisational climate on well-being, commitment and retention by using models that measure interpersonal conflict, work flexibility, overload, and the availability of support and resources that foster well-being and job commitment (e.g. Job-Demand Resource theory: JDC/JDC-SKarasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

This research also investigated the role of organisational climate (perceptions of Police officers about their command), context (managerial practices), and stressors (e.g., conflicts, victimisation) on the predictive, protective, and mediating role of psychological strengths. We also considered the degree to which the work climate and context answered the basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) that SDT and psychological empowerment theory propose. Multiple constructs known to

be of direct relevance to these issues but harder to control via organisational procedures (e.g., coping, personality, life effectiveness) were also considered to maximise the relevance of the results to inform future intervention strategies.

4.1. PARTICIPANTS

This report is based on the qualitative data collected in this research:

- Interviews with 40 officers from three Sydney metropolitan LACs and three rural/regional LACs comprising 65% males and 35% females and from all ranks including 5% unsworn; and
- Responses to an open-ended question in the online survey (“Do you have any other suggestions about how to boost NSWPF and morale?”), was completed by 338 participants comprising 69% males and 31% females from all ranks, including 7% unsworn.

The male/female ratio of responses closely correlates with the percentage of total male and female staff within NSWPF for the years 2012-14 (NSWPF, 2014). Unsworn staff, who make up almost 18% of the NSWPF workforce, were underrepresented.

Interview participants were selected to give maximum representation of the whole force, and the survey was deployed to all staff, with voluntary participation. It is worth noting that the open-ended question was the last of 252 questions asked in the survey, and 26% of participants did not reach the end of the survey. Of those who completed the survey, 31% answered the final question.

Purposeful maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2009), a method which ensures the selected participants provide the best representation of the total force, was used. Potential interview participants volunteered to participate. From these, 40 individuals were purposefully selected to include long serving officers (15+ years), officers with 5-10 years of service, and new recruits with up to 5 years of service; and also to encompass ranks including: Probationary Constable, Constable, Senior Constable, Leading Senior Constable, Sergeant, Senior Sergeant, Inspector, Superintendent, and unsworn staff. Participants to the open-ended survey question also held ranks from Probationary Constable to Superintendent.

Participation in interviews was voluntary. All participants were reassured that they could withdraw at any time, they did not have to answer any question they were not comfortable with, and they would not be identified to NSWPF within any subsequent report. Participants were also made aware that if they became distressed, the interview could be immediately terminated, and a list of counselling services and their telephone numbers could be supplied. Participants' confidence in this research approach is indicated in the fact that existing participants encouraged other officers to contact researchers and participate in the study.

Researchers spoke to participants 'off the record' for approximately 5-10 minutes about the aims, method, and goals of the research and general conversation before formal commencement of the interview.

4.2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the motivations for joining and staying in NSWPF and the reasons for people to leave NSWPF?
- 2) What are the existing problems with the job – the events or causes leading to problems with NSWPF staff well-being?

- 3) How does working as a police officer impact on overall well-being, including home life and social aspects?
- 4) What are the coping mechanisms and protective factors used by police officers?
- 5) What are the positive characteristics of the command and the organisation?
- 6) What are the negative characteristics of the command and the organisation?
- 7) What might be some innovative solutions and recommendations for improving NSWPF well-being?

4.3. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Verbatim transcripts were made of the interviews (de-identified). Content analysis classified data into categories coded according to particular phrases or responses that related to the research aims and questions about well-being and organisational factors. This coding was initially performed separately by two researchers, who then met to formulate a framework based on their individual perspectives on the transcript data. This co-classified framework was then used to code all interviews and the responses to the open-ended survey question with a particular focus on looking for solutions.

NVivo (version 10) qualitative data analysis software was used to organise the data, provide rapid access to concepts as they emerged from the data, and to assist in reporting. Themes relating to the research aims and questions were workshopped by the team using an emic approach (a contextualised approach to reveal participants' implicit perspectives) and the key dimensions identified in the study's conceptual framework. This preliminary analysis formed the basis for further discussion and refinement of the coding categories. String and pattern searches were then conducted on the transcripts and open-ended question responses to identify additional patterns in the responses (Richards, 2005).

5. Analysis and Recommendations

A. REPLICATING POSITIVE COMMAND CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Recommendation A.1

Investigate and identify the key success factors enabling exemplary commands to support NSWPF staff autonomy, positive relationships, competence, and resilience, whilst at the same time decrying bullying behaviour, and utilise this knowledge to develop training resources to enable all commands to replicate these successful strategies more broadly to enhance a supportive culture of workplace well-being.

Of participants who commented on what they felt constituted the positive management and/or leadership qualities of supportive commands, many spoke of being granted a high level of autonomy in their day-to-day work instead of being micromanaged and under close surveillance. Their sense of autonomy was boosted through positive management communication styles, which one participant described as ‘where the rationale behind was explained and discussed’:

“Probably the biggest thing I've learned in the last couple of years...is communicating what you're doing to them and why”.

The trust that supervisors had in their team was also reported, and is a key component of autonomy:

“I think people will do the job and if you see them swanning around well I don't mind them having a talk every now and again. I think there's a bit of give and take. So I tend to trust that they're doing their job until I hear differently.”

However, it was widely reported that lower ranking officers were simply told what to do but rarely told why they were doing it:

“I feel like employees are pieces on a chess board that someone higher up “play” and we are not aware we are moving until it happens, nor are we told why we have to do certain things.”

This contradictory evidence of leadership quality may be reflective of the NSWPF's continuing move away from its paramilitary style of leadership, which has left a legacy of leadership and management styles in some LAC's that are authoritarian and inflexible. Such approaches to leadership are almost always counterproductive:

“You're not going to get the best out of people by being like a dictator. Do as I say, not as I do, don't question me, just do it, that sort of type of leadership is rarely effective.

I've seen a lot of disgruntled people with those types of managers who just really are inflexible to the extent that people just give up and they just say, I'm not going to achieve anything here, I'm not feeling like I'm contributing, I suppose, in a lot of respects.”

5.1. COMMAND CULTURE AND LEASERSHIP SUPPORT

Supportive colleagues were viewed by participants to contribute to a positive culture of command. Police officers reported feeling much more motivated at work when there is collegial support and trust. The increase in motivation and camaraderie was also apparent when there were good working relationships not just with immediate co-workers, but also supervisors:

“Everyone looks out for everyone, willing to help one another out when it comes down to it. It’s a really good atmosphere to work in.

“I think really it does come down to the supervisors and your workmates because if you’re working with someone you don’t like or people that aren’t motivated, ... you’re not going to build your motivation as well.”

Participants discussed improvements in the number of incidents of workplace conflict, as one stated:

“We’re making headway. We’re making good headway, definitely”.

This may be a result of the series of workshops which were introduced in 2014 to address workplace conflict, bullying, and ‘the boys club’ mentality. But also changes to staff at senior levels was reported to have the capacity to completely change the dynamics of entire commands and the way in which they work:

“Our new boss, [has] been a breath of fresh air ... There’s also been a new Inspector just before ... and between those two have really changed what it was like here. People are working for each other and there’s a common purpose again, it’s not every man for himself.”

While some officers highlighted the caring environment of some police commands, approximately three quarters of those interviewed reported a lack of support and trust between colleagues. Unsupportive colleagues clearly contributed to the loss of camaraderie and a negative environment and others reported working in environments they considered uncaring and impersonal. Despite hearing about being part of the ‘blue family’ participants felt that the reality was very different:

“The camaraderie and the mateship, a lot of people feel it doesn’t exist anymore so dealing with that sort of negativity all the time, that’s constantly there. You’re sort of watching over your shoulder these days who’s out to stick a knife in my back and that’s the way most people feel.”

Some reported very little support from superiors and colleagues after attending potentially traumatic crime scenes. Instead of receiving emotional support or understanding from co-workers after such an experiences, officers reported been told to:

“Toughen up and keep going”, “toughen up you soft cock”,

and were accused of being:

“Slack... There’s no, Are you alright? Do you need a hand?”

Others talked about their superiors following the correct procedures after attending a deceased but commented that they did not appear to have any concern for the officer and the whole experience was very impersonal:

“Detective Inspector [de-identified], he came up to me and goes, I logged you... to receive a call from the Employee Assistance but that was it, he didn’t ask me how it was going or anything. He just goes; I’ve logged you to receive a call for that service.”

Mechanisms to support officers after traumatic incidents are discussed further in **Error! Reference source not found.**
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5.2. POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Recommendation A.2:

Consideration could be given to mental health first aid training for supervisors to enable them to identify personnel exhibiting signs of excessive stress and recommend or enact the appropriate course of action.

Throughout the interviews a number of officers reported that adopting a positive attitude toward their work made the job easier and lowered their levels of stress. Research on positive thinking and optimism shows that optimists enjoy better health, build stronger relationships, are more productive, and experience less stress (e.g. Seligman, 2012). These benefits were highlighted in the interview data as demonstrated in the quote below:

"I'm very positive about the job and about getting things done and that brings about a much better atmosphere with positivity...that's what we need to learn, is about being positive and going forward and having a better attitude towards things, like the cup is half full, not half empty."

As stated in the quote above, being positive while at work improved the overall atmosphere of the workplace and made it more enjoyable for colleagues. Some of the participants explained that they made an effort to be happy at work even when feeling down or having a bad day:

"I think with the people I work with, I generally put on a more happy façade, just every day because it's just easier to get through the day and easier to be happy, not only just for you, but for the person you are working with because it's easier for them to get along with someone who's happy to talk and happy to easy going and happy."

However, as some of the participants admitted, putting on a happy façade can mask a major underlying problem:

"Well I was probably just joking around, not - like still laughing and carrying on and all that sort of thing, yes. But underneath I didn't want to be there at all...I suppose they did notice it towards the end that I just wasn't happy."

This suggests there is value in training leaders to be alert to the signs that an officer is distressed, especially given the tendency of police officers to employ coping mechanisms such as not speaking about trauma, using black humour to dissociate, or otherwise putting on a "happy façade".

5.3. SOCIAL SUPPORT OUTSIDE THE 'BLUE FAMILY'

"One of the biggest things to destroy the social life within the police is a 12-hour roster because they have no time to socialise."

Much of the literature surrounding policing discusses officers becoming immersed in the 'police culture'. There was strong evidence of this throughout the interviews with officers confirming that because of shared work experiences they:

"Socialise a lot more with work people, as they've all got similar minds and things, and are on similar journeys"

Others claimed that they socialised with work colleagues because they believed that;

"People don't like police so you tend to stick with your own kind sort of thing because we are what we are"

While the 'blue family' is seen as an essential support mechanism, isolation from outside networks can result in an "us and them" mentality whereby officers become cynical toward the public, which leads to hostility and suspicion (e.g. Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993). This further isolates police socially and increases the need for solidarity between officers, hence reinforcing the negative attitude toward others outside the force (Chan et al., 2003; Scaramella et al., 2011).

Some officers reported friendships falling away after they joined the police, with many believing that it was due to a clash between the views and values they held as police officers, and the views and values of those who were once their friends:

"... Some of those friends I was a bit like 'I don't know if I should really associate with you'. Just because of their views on drug use and stuff like that were very liberal and very open. Obviously that doesn't bode well with the police force and my views."

As previously reported, networks outside the force and interpersonal skills that enable officers to interact with anyone they come into contact with are an important protective factor. Some participants however, successfully retained networks outside the force:

"You need to be able to have a network outside the job. I've always worked on a process of, as I said before, work's work and home's home ... I think once your work becomes home and vice versa it ends up a drama. But you still need to be able to talk to other people, other than who you're working with."

This shows that many officers have developed effective coping mechanisms that mean they do not lose the benefits of social networks, and reinforces the point that having time to socialise and understanding techniques that help officers to prevent the emotional strain of work 'taking over' their lives are important areas in which organisational support can have a positive effect.

Almost 80% of those interviewed within regional and rural commands mentioned that isolation from their families and friends was a problem, particularly from officers relocated a long way from home:

"When they've been stationed here and they're from Sydney, that's where all their family is so they don't have that support network. It's very hard to be suddenly sent out to a country location."

Although the research shows that external social and other interests are essential to helping officers to not over-invest in the role of a police officer (Gilmartin, 2002) some officers stationed in rural areas reported that they felt they had to restrict their social lives in order to avoid people they have encountered in the job. Others had found effective compartmentalisation techniques, which suggests that support for officers stationed in regional/rural towns may need to extend to the specific nature of living and working in a small town:

"My partner, she has friends outside of the police obviously, but if she goes out, I won't go with her because I know half the people she's with and I've charged some of them or I know they've been charged and I know what they do, so I can't go out in those situations."

But,

"I'm on a first name basis with most people, even crooks. ...in those small communities you've just got to leave your job at work [and] once you take your suit off you're a normal person and you've got to mix with whomever."

Some participants also remarked on a lack of support from the NSWPF in relation to finding appropriate accommodation when having to relocate suddenly to a rural or remote area, the general lack of resources available, and promotion and training opportunities which staff members viewed as inequitable and unfair when other new recruits in city areas had multiple opportunities to advance themselves:

“There’s an endless amount of things you could do down in Sydney or Newcastle, but up here we just don’t have anything.”

5.4. LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Recommendation A.3:

That a comprehensive program of 360 degree feedback be provided as part of leadership training in order to both enhance leadership capability but also engender a less “top-down” approach to leadership. Such upwards feedback has often been shown to be one of the most powerful influences upon developing a more transformational/coaching style of leadership (e.g. Alexander & Hardy, 2014)

“I’m glad we don’t go to the pub and drink 10 schooners when we’ve done something nasty. I’m glad we’re doing it better ... we haven’t got softer, we’re just better at leading our people.”

Consistent with the components of Self-Determination Theory presented in Chapter 2, staff appreciated working in commands where workplace practices promoted a sense of autonomy, competence, and positive relationships between colleagues, and allowed for on-the-job learning and flexibility. Throughout the responses to this research, positive reinforcement including praise, encouragement, and recognition from colleagues and the public, but particularly from supervisors, was seen to serve as a protective factor against job dissatisfaction and increased officer’s self-perceptions of job competence, motivation, and commitment to duty. The effects of using such a strategy within the NSWPF was evident when participants spoke about the way being recognised for their efforts immediately lifted their mood and increased their motivation on the job, but as this participant commented part of this was to alleviate frustration over other officers’ low performance:

“Then the people that aren’t helping that should be helping, people being lazy, you hate the work, you hate the people and that’s where the cycle stops until you do a good job and someone goes, oh good job, you did really well and then you get that high again.”

Supervisors reported how important it was to communicate with their staff in a positive and constructive way, even when issuing a rebuke:

“Yes, you get your little conflicts, if someone’s not copping jobs out on the road and another car crew has got to pick up the slack. They’ll come in and go, so-and-so did nothing all day. You have a quick word with them. Again, it comes down to how we talk to the staff. There are certain ways of talking to someone to get your message across. You come across loud and grumpy they probably won’t work for you, or work as hard. If you approach it a different way, they’ll do anything for you, and that’s how I look at it.”

Furthermore, there was evidence that some leaders viewed passing down feedback as an integral part of management support:

“I really try and push that down and let them know that good praise is coming from the commissioner and the deputy and the region commander and the community leaders ... and go ‘look this is you, this is you’.”

Unsurprisingly, the majority of participants (92.5%) favoured commands that had a caring environment. This ‘culture of caring’ was identified as one of the most positive aspects of job and manifested in various forms and situations. For example, it could be something simple like the staff being given assistance to complete tasks on time, tracking the number of traumatic incidents attended by each

officer, or the increase in attention given to the mental health of employees, supervisors, and senior staff. There was recognition among the participants that policing is a collaborative job where dependence upon, and trust in each other is essential:

“A positive aspect is being able to trust the people you work with, having confidence in the people you work with. At the end of the day, if I'm working with you my life is in your hands ... it's working in a team environment. ... so working together in a good, hard core knit team is so important.”

The supportive environment of some commands was also demonstrated by colleagues who regularly check in with each other after a particularly disturbing event:

“In this job...if you go to a hard job, everyone's making sure you're okay, [asking] how're you're doing, all that sort of thing.”

The culture of caring is shaped by the leadership practices of the command, and there is encouraging evidence that many leaders show leadership that actively supports the mitigation of occupational stressors and, as noted earlier, are alert to the tendency of officers to hide their stress:

“... if someone goes to a traumatic incident we'll offer them a debrief, whether their psychologist, EAP or whatever and nine times out of 10 they'll say, no I'm alright but I got a system there that bloody five ticks and you're going. I'll just go and say to them, I'm under an obligation under work, health, and safety to ensure your welfare and well-being at work and you are going.”

The following participant remarked that his supervisor was part of the peer support program, and that this made a difference to his approachability and support:

“He has no hesitation in saying, “Look ring me. I don't care if it's 3:00am in the morning.” If you need to speak he'll speak. He's the kind of guy that you can speak to quite easily regardless of what his rank is you know what I mean.”

While the above findings show that there is some good practice in the organisation, only approximately one quarter of responses rated their command management positively. Micro-management and the lack of trust between higher and lower ranking staff was often reported as problematic:

“... the command nit-picks all little, often superfluous, details. It makes people feel useless and want to leave the command. It makes us feel like the commander and the duty officers don't trust us and treat us like children. I think there is a huge distrust between management and the constables. The Constables don't trust management to look out for them and feel that they would never have their back if trouble struck. I think management perceives the Constables as lazy and incompetent. It makes it hard to come to work in such a negative environment.”

Some responses pointed to a need for better leadership training to enable leaders to balance 'authoritarian' and 'permissive' approaches. Participants commented that some leaders are inclined to be friends or buddies with their staff instead of playing a directing role, resulting in a lack of leadership. Although officers agreed that in LACs with the “buddy” leadership style (termed “permissive” in the literature) staff were much closer, some questioned the benefits of such a style:

“In [de-identified] it is very rank orientated where if your sergeant said, jump, you would say, how high? Here it's like you're a buddy... they're buddies with everybody. So it's like they can't give discipline because they don't want to disturb the buddy thing.”

A lack of communication between senior management and junior officers was mentioned frequently in the online survey responses. Many officers believed that their concerns are rarely heard by senior management due to top-down, unidirectional, communication.

“It would also go a long way for upper management to actually listen to GD's and the supervisors within our department when we speak of our workloads and issues to keep morale up and limit any ill feelings.”

Finally, participants also stated that when their senior officers' engaged with the frontline rather than sitting behind a desk issuing orders this was highly appreciated and helped to boost the morale of the whole team:

“I think that's a huge thing for people, whether it be older senior constables or sergeants, or some of the young people, to see the boss have a go, have a crack herself.”

Being mentored by more senior staff was also commented on by lower ranking officers as providing them with valuable learning opportunities:

“One of the best leaders ... I had before I was on commission rank ... he would share with you what he was thinking, which I really got a lot out of, and I've never forgotten that.”

5.5. LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND PROMOTION

Recommendation A.4:

The NSWPF could aim to provide leadership training that is delivered to all ranks that focuses, to varying degrees depending on rank, on the three fundamental psychological needs for: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (see Chapter 1). Research consistently shows that failing to satisfy these needs results invariably in negative functional consequences for mental health and poor persistence and performance (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000).

For supervisory staff, such training could use the strengths-based research approaches listed in Recommendation A.1 to emphasise key themes of prosocial team building and conflict resolution, listening and communication, coaching skills, reinforcement of discipline and professionalism, empowering staff, engaging with the frontline, and mentoring junior staff.

Recommendation A.5:

Research participants suggested it would be beneficial to provide additional training to sergeants, particularly those who directly manage the 'troops' in management concepts to allow staff more autonomy to work freely towards their work objectives, rather than becoming at risk of being process focused and needing to micro-manage.

Recommendation A.6

Feedback from the initial data indicates a need to review the promotion system to ensure that it is effective and that staff are given realistic expectations for promotion.

Over a quarter of interview participants reported dissatisfaction with the promotion process. Currently, performance review in the NSWPF is not linked to promotion as Senior Management Team recommendations only account for about 10% of the promotion criteria. The current exam-based promotion process was considered flawed in that it was felt to promote people who were good at memorising procedures and facts but not necessarily good at operational policing, and a number of participants reported that they felt they were being held back because of the academic approach:

“It's really frustrating and I feel like I'm not being given an opportunity to really progress in the organisation because of a system that doesn't let me have an opportunity to project my strengths, my skills, my knowledge because it's based on a regurgitation.”

Others noted that ‘text-book answers’ are rewarded in the promotion system, when they may not be the best approach on the ground:

“Persons who think outside of the box in addressing scenarios are marked down because they do not give textbook answers yet achieve the same and sometimes better results.”

Participants reported that those who ‘aced’ the exams were not perceived to perform well in their roles, quickly losing respect as their failure to ‘walk the talk’ became apparent. Responses indicated that many officers wanted leaders who were operationally knowledgeable before they reached senior ranks:

“Police officers seeking promotion into senior management ranks should not have to undergo a steep learning curve when they are promoted, they should already have the skills and the abilities to transition smoothly into those positions.”

Participants also suggested that additional training in team management is needed when officers are promoted from the ranks:

“They might know everything about their job, but they’re not always the best people managers. ...I don’t think they get anywhere near enough training, and I don’t think anywhere near enough emphasis is put on that side of things when they go for those jobs.”

This situation is being addressed by the NSWPF with specific training for sergeants transitioning to inspector rank. Previously a staff member could not be promoted to the rank of sergeant until they had reached a service of between 13 to 15 years. This requirement has since changed and now an officer can now be promoted to sergeant as early as 7-8 years’ service. As a result, some participants believe that some sergeants that hold this rank do not have enough wisdom and experience to be a leader and/or to navigate a complicated system (and that many are promoted beyond their capabilities).

Encouragingly, the NSWPF have initiatives in place to address training gaps for leaders. For example, the NSW Police Leadership Centre officially opened in 2009 and provides training to officers at or above the rank of inspector, and equivalent grade administrative officers. The centre is currently in the process of establishing ongoing professional development programs. Course content focus includes conflict resolution, building team and networking capacity, and building strategies for resilience and psychological health. The Centre has affiliations with the United States Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), a police research and policy organisation and a provider of management services, technical assistance, and executive-level education. Also, a special project team was created and tasked with establishing leadership training across five LAC trial sites. Known as the Foundational Leadership Program, various leadership theories were tested to ascertain “what works” for leadership and management development (Pearson-Goff & Herrington, 2013).

B. FURTHER STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR INJURED OFFICERS

Recommendation B.1:

Participants strongly felt that injured officers need to be better supported by the organisation, colleagues, and supervisors. This research suggests, and we would recommend, that the NSWPF continue to further develop strong support mechanisms and established return to work plans, with achievable goals, to enable injured officers to successfully come back to work and re-join their teams.

Recommendation B.2

Early intervention and immediate post-traumatic incident follow-up (debriefing) should be built into management procedures to ensure effective monitoring of frontline police well-being in order to support well-being and prevent the exacerbation of psychological problems. This could be further supported by taking measures to ensure commands adhere more strictly to the welfare policy and are more vigilant

monitoring staff exposure to traumatic incidents. For example participants suggested involvement in traumatic incidents and debriefings should be mandatorily recorded by Commanders to become part of the effective monitoring of front-line police well-being.

In the 2011 Review of Injury Management Practices, an observation was made that an improvement in leadership skills would also ensure greater engagement with injured officers - with the aim of returning them to the workplace as soon as possible.

The responses to this study indicated that officers experiencing psychological injuries could benefit from more positive emotional support from the organisation, supervisors, and colleagues. Some injured officers reported that they are subjected to stigmatisation, do not always feel valued, and often feel isolated from the organisation and colleagues. When staff are on sick leave, they lose one of the most positive aspects of the job - camaraderie. This is also one of the three fundamental psychological factors leading to well-being; relatedness. Redeploying them back in with their team, where their colleagues can provide direct support, and where they in turn can play a role in their team, is of paramount importance. It was also suggested that more could be done to integrate restricted duties staff back into the team environment. It has been suggested by a senior officer that restricted duties staff could directly liaise with the public, operating from a shopfront within shopping centres or mobile vans for example. Restricted duties staff could still act in a defensive response to a threat, even though they cannot actively pursue offenders.

When returning from medical leave participants appreciated support from other staff members and the organisation:

“... the Force has been very understanding by allowing me to work at a command closer to home since I'm unable to drive and rely on transportation from family.”

However, there was evidence throughout the interviews of supervisors taking it upon themselves to look after the officers under their command in instances where they felt that the official assessment of an officer's fitness for duty was poor:

“We've actually got a fellow downstairs; he's got an injured shoulder. Technically he's not on restricted duties but I won't allow him to go back out because he's having an operation on 30 April. Again, that's just my decision; that's not the commander's decision. The commander said he was on full duty but no, that's stupid, so I'll keep him inside and look after him until he has his operation.”

Participants also frequently commented that if they took leave for psychological or physical injury, follow-up calls from supervisors was important, but that the enquiries had to come from genuine care and not just organisational requirements:

“It's important for the staff member to know that your concerns are genuine and you're not just 'ticking boxes.’”

Conversely, this remark implies that 'ticking boxes' is often what follow up calls are about, and this is borne out in some of the other responses which talked about limited follow-ups on officers on medical leave. Some received initial support, but there was the perception that 'follow up' procedures were impersonal:

“To start with, everyone cares about poor whatever, he's gone through this or gone through that. Then obviously it's just life, everyone gets on with things and there's probably not enough going back and saying, how ya going, or what's going on?”

Some participants reported that there was still a prevalent perception that psychological problems represent weakness. Having worries that they may be judged as weak and being put on restricted duties,

made police officers reluctant to discuss issues with colleagues, peer support officers, internal psychologists, or to take stress leave:

“There is still that culture of not being seen as weak and not being able to cope. That probably impacted on me not wanting to go off either...Some people saw it as a dummy spit or just dropping the ball.”

Also revealed in the responses was that many of the officers that had experienced work-related psychological problems had difficulty taking stress leave. They reported not only having to deal with the immediate issues triggering the stress but also the stigma of mental disease and colleagues perception of ‘*rotting the system*’:

“There are some that actually bludge, for want of a better word, on their injury, or head noises. It's very hard to work out if someone's got a bad head noise or not.”

And:

“... some of them are legitimately sick and there's others that are just milking it, and they've been milking it for years. They'll come back with 2000 hours leave, probably get a payout and get all that paid out and go and do something else.”

The quote directly above implies that there is the perception that only “*some of them are legitimately sick*” rather than the majority, however, the best available evidence indicates that such faking, while significant, is small. There is little agreement about actual proportions - estimates vary from about 7% to 30% (Ballinger, 2002). With the negative perceptions of fellow officers, the reported lack of support for those on long-term leave and the perception that taking medical (and particularly psychological) leave is ‘soft’, it appears that in some cases applying for stress leave was an additional cause of anxiety.:

“Do you know what the irony is? It probably would have caused me a lot of stress trying to get stress leave.”

It was also acknowledged by participants that the difficulty in taking stress leave is partially attributed to difficulties in assessing mental health issues:

“It's pretty hard to judge a person's mental toughness but it's easy to judge their physical toughness and I think that's the criteria”.

The strict criteria and the sheer effort in completing all the paperwork (especially to achieve an ‘on duty’ illness status), was frequently reported as a deterrent for applying for stress leave even in cases where it was clearly warranted.

Promisingly, many officers agreed attitudes towards stigmatisation and rotting is on the decline, albeit gradually, through NSWPF initiatives. PANSW acknowledges a shift within NSWPF from ‘how to deal with the injuries’ to ‘how to prevent them’ but it is clear from the interview data that there is still some work to do in changing staff attitudes toward co-workers taking stress leave.

5.5.1 INSURER CONFLICTS

Within NSWPF, emotional intelligence with respect to mental health issues is moving in a positive and determined direction. However, it would appear that a lack of scaffolding between NSWPF, the EAP, and the insurer contributes to poor psychological support for injured officers. Unanimously, participants believed that the most problematic in this process was the insurance company. For example, participants claimed that dealing with the insurers compounded their injury:

“Going through the insurance company gave me a mental breakdown just before I came back to work. They are the most horrible people you could possibly meet. They ignore you, they don’t respond back to you, they just don’t help.”

It was also reported that the contracted insurance company was incompetent in keeping track of their claims, and it was reported that the constant pressure put on officers from insurance companies to return to work through phone calls and letters continued even after the officer returned to work.

Encouragingly, the NSWPF are aware of the problems associated with insurance claims and the pressures that the insurer (MetLife) has placed on police staff. In 2014, former NSW Police Minister Mr Ayres mentioned his disappointment that former officers were experiencing stress as a result of surveillance techniques being used by MetLife and hoped that with the recently agreed and improved processes with MetLife, stresses experienced by former police officers could be minimised. He claimed that the delay in assessing claims has also been addressed and MetLife has engaged additional claims and legal staff to progress outstanding claims and is streamlining its decision-making process.

5.5.2 PROGRESS MADE UNDER THE GOVERNMENT FUNDED NSWPF INITIATIVES

Recommendation B.3:

Given that the NSWPF, with the support of the NSW government, has invested significantly in programs to promote well-being and improve injury management and rehabilitation, it is recommended that an analysis be undertaken of the workforce to determine whether or not the 12% of police who were found to be unable to be deployed in 2011 has increased or decreased.

The NSW Government provided funding for the NSWPF to implement an initiative improving the well-being of NSWPF staff. The initiative has a strong focus on injury, and specifically on management and redeployment. The NSWPF, with the support of the NSW government, invested significantly in welfare focused programs. The NSWPF now has a large number of activities and initiatives in place to:

- Promote well-being and prevent injury,
- Improve injury management, and
- Rehabilitate and redeploy injured officers.

Specific programs focussed on preventing and supporting officers with PTSD include but are not limited to:

- State wide leadership training for supervisors on injury management, prevention, and support,
- Monitoring traumatic incidents at a region, LAC, rank, and officer level,
- Implementation of recommendations from project evaluations, such as expanding eWellcheck,
- Mobile nursing services, physiotherapy services, and follow up fitness programs, and
- New deployment guidelines and psychological job analysis tools for injured officers.

C. ENHANCING RECRUITMENT AND EARLY CAREER TRAINING

Recommendation C.1

To prepare for the emotional upheavals that inevitably occur on the job, the book ‘Emotional survival for law enforcement: A guide for officers and their families’ (Gilmartin, 2002) could be distributed to all new recruits. Gilmartin’s work aims to help officers and their families maintain and/or improve their quality of life both personally and professionally, and advocates utilising psychological awareness and mindfulness as protective measures against emotional distress. This makes it an invaluable resource. Additionally, allowing time within commands to watch live pod or webcasts of Gilmartin’s seminars

(regularly organised jointly by NSWPF and PANSW) should be further encouraged. Although the NSWPF has made the relevant media widely available to staff, more could be done to direct and encourage staff to view these broadcasts. The aim should be to generate discussion, and for the advice provided in the broadcasts to be reinforced regularly, and to reach as many staff as possible, particularly those in remote areas.

5.5.3 MOTIVATIONS TO JOIN

Recommendation C.2:

Research participants suggested that current NSWPF recruitment advertising needs to be refined to provide a more accurate image of the nature of tasks undertaken and the skills required to perform the role of a NSW Police Officer rather than enticing potential recruits with 'feel good' promotional materials.

"This is the job where you can have one job and have a million other jobs because you can choose what you want to do."

Job security, income and better career opportunities were key motivations, especially in the current economic environment (See Figure 1). The base salaries offered by NSWPF were considered high compared with the private sector, and police officers could enter the force before acquiring high level qualifications. The career opportunities available were seen as attractive, from moving up the ranks internally and experiencing a wide variety of duties, to pursuing other law-related jobs. One participant said:

"I wanted to be a prosecutor ... I knew that I could do the police thing for as long as I needed ... then I could do the law thing later and I had a lot of options."

Some police officers stated they joined simply because of a lack of other appropriate alternatives and working as a police officer provided greater status than their previous occupation.

Numerous officers reported that they and their family take pride in working as a police officer. Some stated that they joined because they were influenced by being taught to respect the police from a young age, or had family members who were police officers. Some described a passion for helping people and a strong commitment to making a difference in society:

"I believe that there needs to be checks and balance in place to maintain a safer community, and that police are the key organisation in providing a safe community."

'Working with people' both inside and outside the organisation, and having the power to be able to deal with incidents were also motivators for joining and staying with the NSWPF.

There is a strong perception that many recruits are not suitable for the role.

"We had one young fellow come here about 12 months ago, 18 months ago, and he wasn't going to cut it...He'd go out to do a job and he'd be standing back here. He couldn't look at anybody. He found it really hard being exposed to what he was being exposed to and he couldn't function. I said you've got to go, do yourself a favour, this is not for you."

Participants also believed that during the recruitment phase/initial training, those identified at risk of suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety or depression needed to be culled before being sworn in. Some participants reported having to:

"...watch them turn up at the academy and then the stations knowing who will crack and sure enough within 12 months they are on stress leave."

Participants also argued that the NSWPF could manage this better during the training stage to avoid psychological harm further down the track:

“Some people are just not suited for this. The organisation needs to stop putting these people into a position knowing we are going to harm them.... Some people are not suited to dealing with the dark side of life, and unfortunately, policing is about spending your working life in that world.”

The current police recruitment DVD has a total running time of 139 seconds. Of the total time, 112 seconds target ‘feel-good’ scenarios - helping the community, apprehending an offender, and rescues as a part of a specialist command. Only 25 seconds profiled traumatic scenes, a motor vehicle accident, attending a domestic violence incident, and just two seconds of doing paperwork. It was felt by some of those interviewed that the recruitment video may have provided potential new recruits an unrealistic and inaccurate view of the true nature of policing work. An older recruitment video found on YouTube (possibly circa 1990s) was more balanced with close to a 50/50 ratio of ‘feel-good’ material to what could be described as actual, mundane police work. Participants in this research consistently felt that an over-emphasis on the ‘positive’ aspects of policing was unhelpful for new recruits, as comments in the following section indicate.

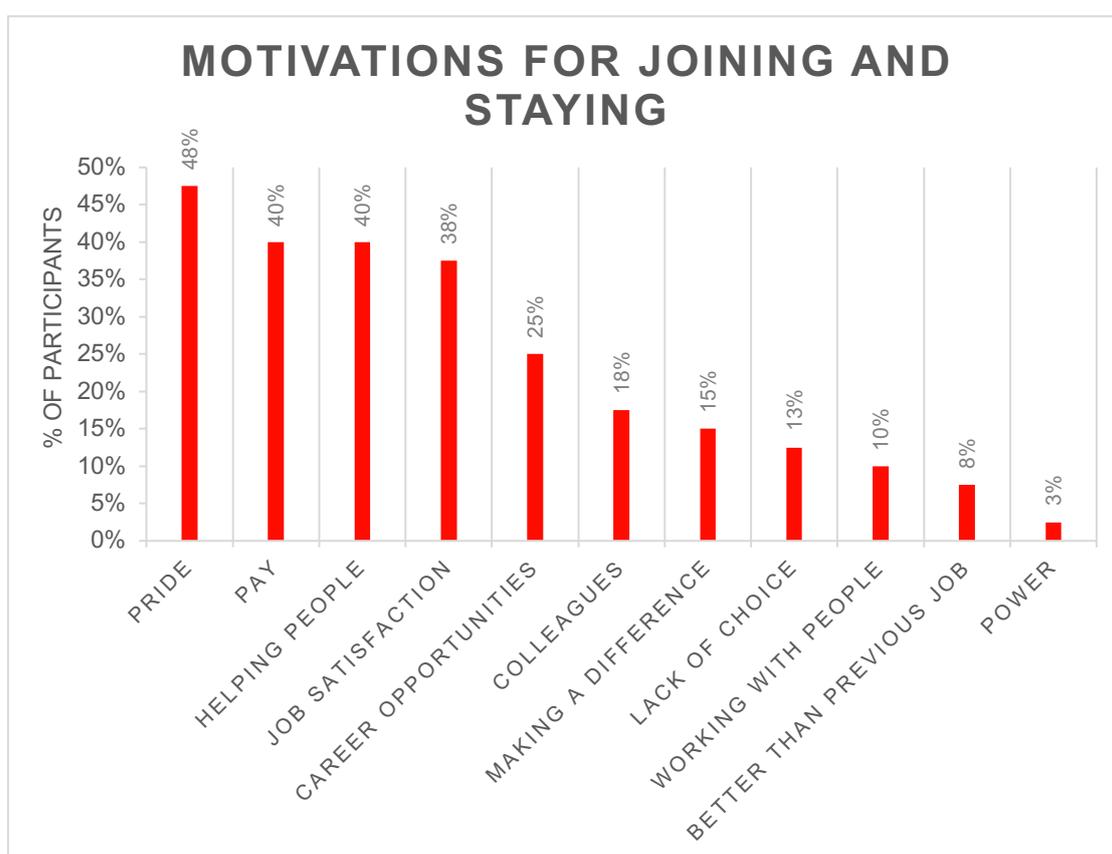


Figure 1: Motivations for joining and staying with the NSWPF.

5.5.4 TRAINING EMPHASIS ON JOB STRESSORS AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Recommendation C.3:

Participants indicated that, while at the academy, recruits need to be trained on strategies to enable their well-being and allow them to be better prepared for the amount of trauma they will witness, the high administrative workload, the realistic nature of the judicial system, and the impact policing can have on managing their personal relationships. Such training at the Academy would be optimal, and resilience training should continue as soon as practical within the probationary period.

"I'd say the biggest reason that they'd be leaving within the five-year mark is they've got in and had a look around and this is not really what I thought the cops would be."

Commitment to stay can be affected by the gap between expectations and the reality of the requirements and conditions of being a police officer. Training that offers better preparation for that reality and manages expectations could ameliorate that gap:

"... when you're starting your training they don't prep you enough for this job. I think they're too frightened of scaring some of them off. But I think it's better to scare them off [initially] than a couple of years into the job. They just don't prep you for the trauma and the things that really bring you unstuck."

It was acknowledged however that there are elements of the job that it may not be possible to train for in the classroom. Probationary constables reported that nothing they learnt in the academy prepared them for what they would see, and the emotions they would experience, once they were actually working in the job:

"They can't train you at the academy. They show you some pictures, but it's not the same. I don't know - it's not really their fault because they can't train you to go and see a dead body. They don't take you to the morgue or anything. I think they used to, not anymore though."

Given that many officers reported a desire to work with others and help people, the reality of working with the public was a common point raised in the interviews. Concerns included being exposed to a high level of public scrutiny through the media and having to tolerate people filming them and posting it on social media. One participant remarked that it should be:

"...an offence to swear at a police officer and for that matter, filming us and posting on social media."

Many of the police officers interviewed believed that negative portrayals of police in mainstream and social media created a lack of understanding, trust and respect between the public and the NSWPF, which may be a significant factor in commitment given that it counteracts the concept that policing is all about positive interactions and helping the community; an aspect of the job that many felt was over-emphasised in recruitment and training material.

That police officers can be resilient and 'look for the positive' in the face of what many see as an unfavourable public and judicial environment is demonstrated in many of the responses, as shown in Figure 2. Valuing positive outcomes on the job and, even though the responses showed that these experiences were few and far between, had a lasting impact and helped officers remember why they joined the force:

"At the end of the day that's why we're here... and if you're honest that's why you join, to help people. Whilst I can count on one hand the amount of times I've actually done that the very few times that you've done it is very rewarding. They're diamond days, they really are, because there's lots of them in between where you don't make a difference at all. So when they come along they're worth savouring."

Many participants reported that policing contributed to negative changes in their attitude towards the public and human behaviour. One participant felt that:

"There's no way you could survive and not have your personality hardened up."

Another commented that:

"I used to have a lot of patience and [now] I've just got nothing. I just get angry."

Conversely, another noted that whilst they were constantly 'looking for the bad', they were aware of the dangers of such thinking:

“That’s one thing I’ve been mindful of personally. I try not to do that. Not get caught up looking for the negative constantly.”

One participant spoke specifically of drawing strength from seeing adverse situations:

“Seeing the strength of character that some people have in adversity, I think that’s a great thing to take from it. Whenever you sit there and think that your life is dealing you a pretty bad hand, you see other people who have been dealt far worse and they continue to step up and go forward. That helps you really build your character and to make you stronger.”

This demonstrates resilience in action and shows that it is realistic and feasible for NSWPF to find ways to train officers in ways to build psychological strength and find opportunity in challenging circumstances. Other participants reported positive changes, such as “self-awareness and self-assurance”, being “more mature”, and “more tolerant and understanding of everyone”. As the quote below demonstrates, this, and mature interpersonal skills, (see also **Error! Reference source not found.**) have the capacity to improve interactions with the public, which in turn may reduce altercations and thus mitigate some of the psychological and physical risks of everyday policing:

“I would rather spend an extra 10 minutes talking someone into the back of the truck than having to wrestle with them. So your communication [style] and things like that come into play. From a personal level that’s how I deal with it ... I’ve never been injured on the job really.”

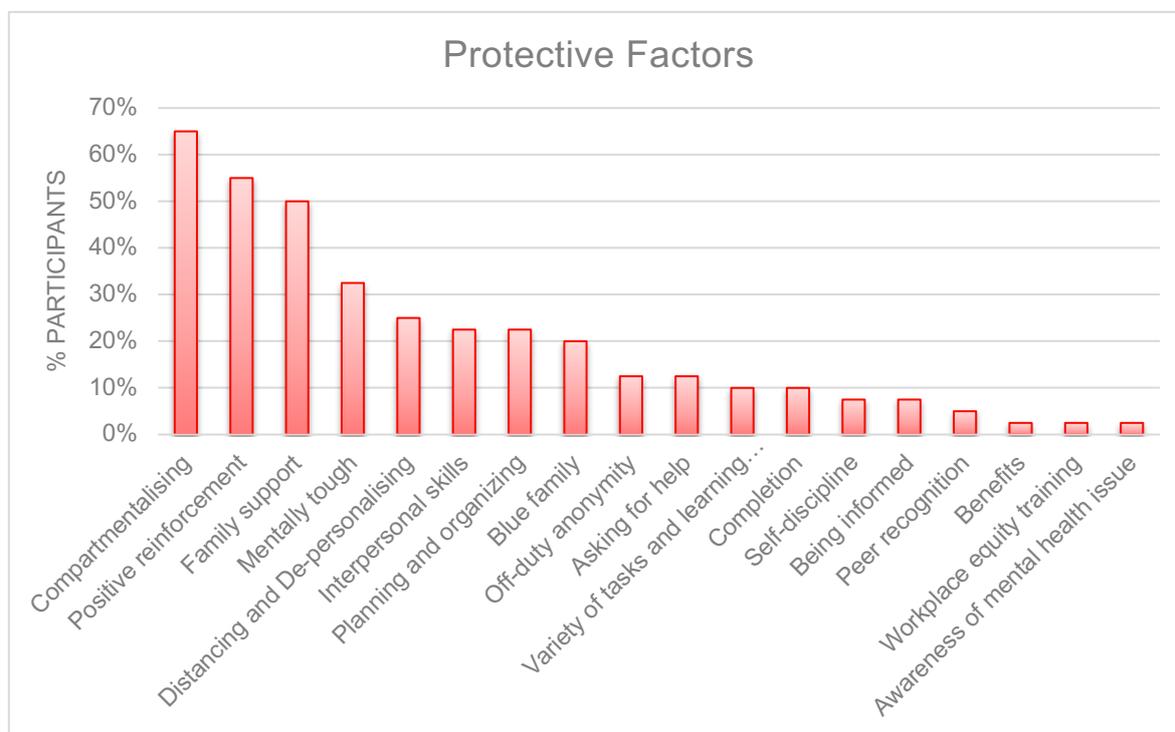


Figure 2: Protective factors employed by members of the NSWPF to cope with stress.

5.5.5 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND CONFLICT

Recommendation C.4:

The research suggested it would be beneficial to provide additional training for new recruits and first year constables, to provide skills to resolve interpersonal conflict, which may assist in reducing the attrition rate in the first five years of employment.

The majority of participants in this research (85%) reported high levels of interpersonal conflicts within the workplace, derived from a number of causes including: overt bullying, laziness, cliques, rumours, racism, and inappropriate judgement of people which ultimately led to an overall negative culture within command.

Furthermore, some of the participating commands were characterised by participants as “boys clubs” where female police officers felt they were excluded and overlooked, something that was so entrenched there really was not a lot that could be done about it:

“I think it still is very much so a boys’ club. It is what it is. I don’t know how the organisation is ever going to get around that.”

Bullying was also considered to be a pervasive problem in a number of commands, and the complaints system to be inadequate in dealing with it.

However, some officers reported that good interpersonal skills reduced conflict with other staff members, offenders, and the public. When dealing with the public, good listening skills and fairness were reported to reduce hostile situations and protect police officers from potential complaints. As the participant below suggests, keeping in mind their original intention of joining the police to ‘help the community’ was a key factor in maintaining good interpersonal skills:

“I’m not someone who’s out there that’s trying to impose myself on the world ... I’ve always tried to have a positive effect on the communities I work in. ... I’m someone who will listen to people and listen to their problems and try and be as understanding as you can.”

In dealing with colleagues, some participants highlighted the importance of conducting early career workplace equity training to develop employees’ awareness of bullying and of how to communicate with colleagues with respect. Such training was valued by those that attended and felt that it “*should be a mandatory thing*” across the whole organisation. Self-discipline was another strategy used by some police officers to protect themselves from interpersonal conflicts at work by respecting others’ privacy and minding their own business:

“I try and make it a point that I don’t...get involved in someone else’s issues. Their problems are their problems, unless they come to you specifically there’s no point in sticking your nose in someone else’s business.”

Many of the participants also claimed that it was important to disregard office gossip and politics to avoid later conflict:

“Don’t talk about other people. You can listen to the gossip and you can listen to the bitchiness, but don’t spread it because it’s just going to come back and they’re all going to pick on you and they won’t get care who said it.”

Finally, when dealing with offenders, responses suggested that good interpersonal skills protected police officers from unnecessary violent confrontations and physical injuries.

5.5.6 SUPPORT FOR NEW OFFICERS

Recommendation C.5:

Research participants indicated a belief that, over the past two years programs have been implemented by NSWPF to help staff deal with stress, however, the interview data indicated a belief that this is only for the ranks of Sergeant and above. More could be done to promote resilience training, especially with new recruits.

Recommendation C.6:

Consideration may be given to developing strategies for providing ongoing additional support to recruits commencing employment in regional and rural areas. This may include assisting in finding accommodation as well as improved support programs to assist with assimilating into a new community whilst still studying.

In order to deal with traumatic incidents and avoid the emotional fallout that can arise from frontline experiences, police “develop mature coping strategies and responses that allow them to shrug off all but the most vivid of death scene” (Greene, 2001, n.p.). To prevent coping strategies becoming maladaptive, support from experienced officers who have successfully developed healthy coping mechanisms can be important. New constables reported that senior officers who were available and supportive were vital to their well-being and ability to cope, as this probationary constable commented:

“Just having a good sergeant that’ll always have your back, that’s probably the best thing and knowing that you can go to her or him and speak to him about the situation and say this is what I’m feeling, I don’t feel right, I’m stressed out and then they try to speak to you with their experience that they’ve had over the years ... It just makes you feel better when someone that’s more experienced has gone through something that you’re going through right now and it just makes you feel a bit better.”

In contrast to officers who feel supported and valued by their colleagues as described above, officers having interpersonal conflicts with their colleagues reported becoming anxious about attending the workplace and made them consider quitting their jobs as demonstrated by the following quote:

“I didn’t like who I worked with and that’s why the job was so hard. I really did consider quitting in the first three months, just because of who I was working with. When I talked to my development officer, I never mentioned I was going to quit but I said I’m not enjoying myself. So she put me on a different team so I was working with different constables, and I loved it. Ever since I got changed, I love coming to work. ... as soon as they changed me to a better team who accepted me and they wanted to teach me, loved it.”

The culture of ‘blue family’ within NSWPF was commonly reported as a strong support system and helped police officers deal with the demands of their jobs, and this was particularly apparent for new recruits who were more likely to persist with the job if they had a patient and understanding Field Training Officer (FTO):

“I had the best FTO ... he made it so easy. There was another senior person on my team where I probably would have cried and quit if I’d had this person...My FTO was awesome, walked me through everything ... I learnt so quick.”

However, this level of support was not always forthcoming and was dependent on command culture and staffing levels. A shortage of experienced staff was reported to cause problems for training new recruits as senior officers in understaffed commands were fully occupied, leaving junior staff to teach junior staff. In some commands new staff reported being excluded by ‘cliques’ and team bonding that was very poor:

“There have been a few people here that have been here a long time. They’ve got their little cliques, so if you’re not in the clique you’re on the outer sort of thing, so it is divided”.

Practical mentoring around meeting administrative need as well as frontline policing may also help to instil practices that help to prevent overwhelming and burnout. Approximately one quarter of participants reported that prioritising, forward planning, and being organised served as a protective factor. Working to standard operating procedures and ordering tasks according to priorities was also reported to negate the need to take work home or work overtime, thereby reducing the impact on home life, but as the below quote shows this again may only be practicable in roles within LACs that are not understaffed or busy:

“I’m able to manage my day so if something has to be done today it’ll be done. There’s no particular time pressures for things to be done immediately. Something can always wait another day with my type of job. Like I said, if it needs to be done I’ll prioritise it, do it first. So no, I don’t take it physically home and I don’t take it mentally home either.”

Having a superior that was approachable, took the time to get to know them, and checked in with them each day was highly valued by junior officers, especially when senior officers took the initiative to interact with them and take an interest in their lives outside of the job:

“You’ve got a senior officer actually asking you off their own back...how’s the family going type thing, I think it’s usually positive.”

Conversely, there was also evidence that junior officers are not comfortable enough with the senior staff or feel supported enough to ask for assistance and admit to making errors:

“...if [probationary constables] fail an assignment or they’re not quite sure how to do something they’ll just lie, get the excavator in instead of just coming out and saying they’ve stuffed up.”

Further responses also suggested that both the organisation and supervisors contributed to this issue:

“The system decides who is acceptable but at a LAC level there are those that believe they are responsible to ‘weed out’ those they deem inappropriate”, said one participant, and another that *“the organisation is centred on crucifying individuals for minor infractions rather than celebrating positive attributions made by employees.”*

Indeed, the subject of ‘draconian management styles’, a ‘no trust model’ and a ‘system designed to punish rather than acknowledge good police work’ was common in the data collected, indicating that despite good progress in the shift from the paramilitary system, there remains a sense among officers that the organisation does not trust its officers to exercise autonomy, or provide a positive and motivating environment that would encourage officers to remain in the job.

5.5.7 COMMITMENT TO STAY, REASONS TO LEAVE

Responses indicated that motivation and commitment to stay were enhanced when they felt they were able to fulfil their expectations around helping the community, making a difference or achieving career goals. Encouragingly, many participants said they felt a sense of pride in what they did. Bonds with work colleagues were also an important factor in the decision to stay (see also 3.2.1).

“I’ve got colleagues that rely on me and need me to support them [and] I’ve got colleagues here that need to support me.”

Receiving appreciation from victims, even if only occasionally, emerged as an important factor keeping officers in the job as one officer explains:

“I love helping people. I had a call from this lady the other day. Her son has a disability and his sister was abusing him and that sort of thing and I looked after him and he keeps my name, like the card with my name in his wallet and he always talks about me.”

Responses from those who considered leaving indicate that a key factor in their decision was disappointment or frustration when their motivations for joining were not supported. Many considered leaving to have more time for their families while others reported that they felt stagnant in their current positions and advancement opportunities were not viable. Some felt that they were ‘trapped’ in NSWPF for financial reasons and chose to leave when they believed they could be paid more elsewhere:

“I guess since I've been married I've been more conscious of the need to be a good provider ... We've got a pretty big mortgage. It just would make it easier if I want to have kids soon for my wife to not to have to worry about working if she didn't want to, and that's not really a reality at the moment. So yeah, I do think about leaving a lot.”

A number of long-serving officers stated that the main reason they remained in the NSWPF was because they felt that skills they developed while working as a police officer were not easily transferable to other jobs outside the organisation offering a commensurate salary.

Many of the frustrations of the job that played a part in decisions to leave are factors that the NSWPF has little control over, such as dissatisfaction with and a lack of authority in the current judicial system and the ‘cat and mouse’ or ‘catch and release’ (as two participants described it) between police and criminals. Many participants felt that this had deleterious effect on officer motivation: “coupled with the seemingly inefficient judicial system, police officers seem to struggle to stay motivated to achieve even the bare minimum.”

“The impacts that courts have on policing and the well-being and morale of officers cannot be discounted. I have seen too many occasions where police officers work is affected because of a lax judicial system, applying inappropriate sentences. Police officers frequently wonder why all the effort should be made when the courts do not recognise the effort of police, or the impacts on victims.”

Most commonly reported, however, and as Figure 3 shows, were factors that can be influenced by positive changes in the organisational culture and the recommendations contained in this report. They include interpersonal conflicts, unexpected job roles, paperwork, management, general duties workload, and lack of resources, and these will be discussed in more detail in section **Error! Reference source not found.** below.

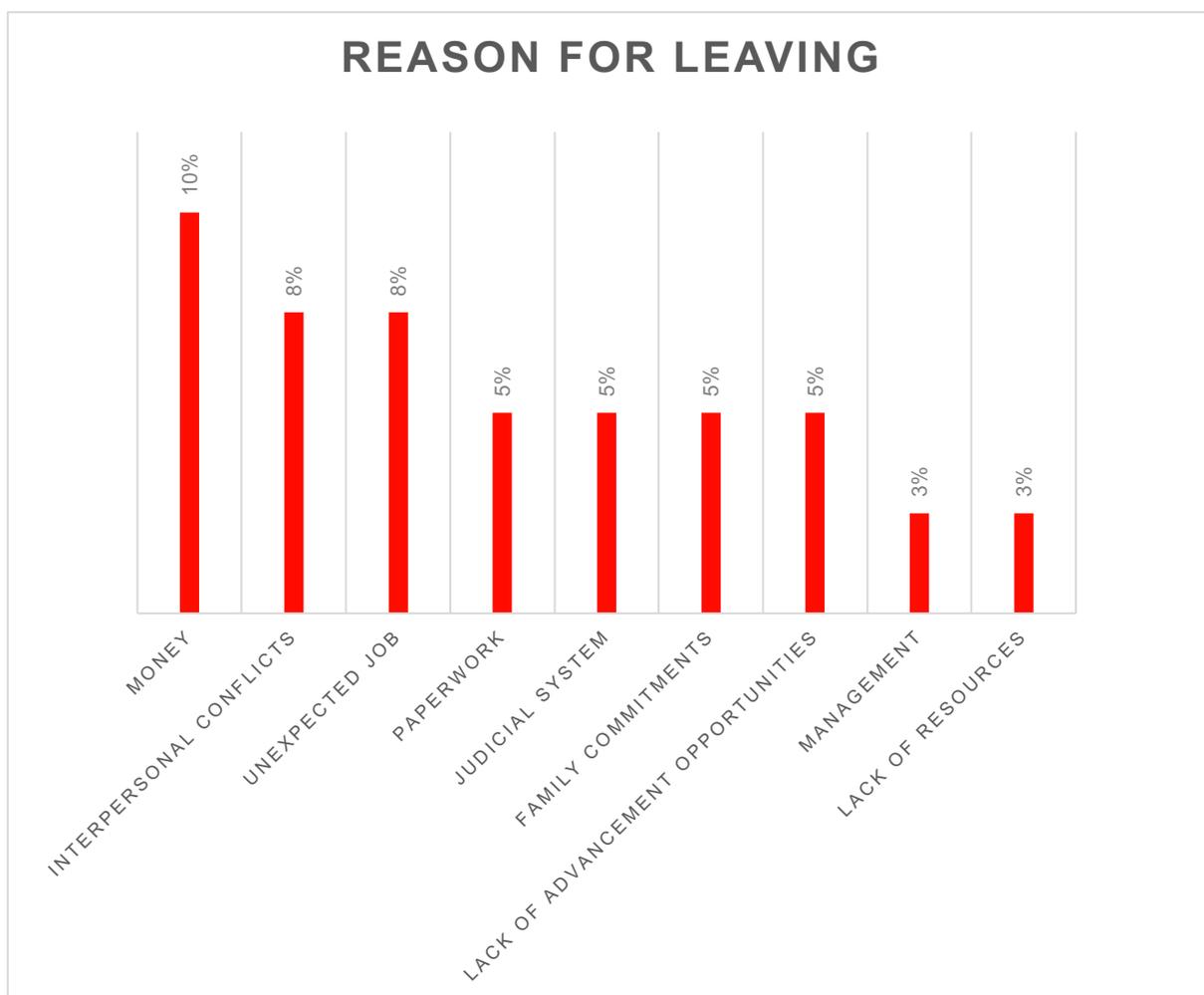


Figure 3: Reasons for Leaving the NSWPF

D. PROMOTING PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Recommendation D.1:

The benefits of physical fitness could be more widely promoted. The use of positive computing applications (Calvo & Peters, 2014) could be investigated to assist staff maintain fitness, and yearly fitness assessments may be advisable to ensure fitness is maintained.

Recommendation D.2:

Management could give consideration to more systematic encouragement of physical activities. Potential strategies could include gyms with physical training instructors at the workplace, subsidies for gym memberships, rostered exercise, support for officers competing in sporting/fitness events (e.g., triathlons), and the establishment of inter-command physical fitness competitions.

Policing is primarily a sedentary occupation (albeit with short periods of high intensity). It is noted many LAC's have well-equipped gyms. However, how well they are utilised before and after 12 hour (and possibly longer) shifts remains unknown. NSWPF has rolled out a comprehensive Workforce Improvement Program including the Physical Training Instructors initiative. Support and facilities are available to staff however they need to be effectively and reasonably encouraged to utilise them. NSWPF staff also has access to the PANSW 'Career and Resilience Education' (C.A.R.E.) Program, an extensive and informative series of brochures and other resources including managing physical and psychological health and fitness. It was agreed among many frontline police officers that they need to

be not only mentally tough but also physically fit given the nature of the job. Physical fitness is a required condition for all police and should remain a high priority. Furthermore, regular physical activity is a popular and well-studied treatment for depression and anxiety, hence contributing to both police officer's physical and psychological well-being (e.g. Oaten & Cheng, 2006; Ramey et al., 2014).

The majority of participants reported that exercise was an excellent way of relieving work-related stress and brings them positivity while a lack of exercise aggravates their fatigue and negative emotions.

“As far as relieving stress, I know going to the gym is sensational. I joined up one of the local gyms and got my little routine you know, 35-40 minutes on either the bike, the cross trainer or the treadmill and I can walk out of there feeling absolutely a million dollars.”

As discussed earlier chronic sleep deprivation compromises police officers' ability to concentrate and perform their daily duties. Some participants reported that they use exercise to improve sleep quality, improve concentration at work, build up resilience, reduce hyper vigilance, and as an alternative to more maladaptive strategies such as the abuse of alcohol for relieving stress:

“I go on a treadmill in the lounge room... for six kilometres... [I'm] sleeping well, probably drinking a little less perhaps. I mean I'd easily do two beers and a glass of wine a day without fail. But I find now that I'm exercising I don't feel like having a beer as much.”

Moreover, exercise also allowed frontline police to maintain fitness and thus reduce the risk of being injured on duty and the associated cost of long term sick leave or stress leave to the NSWPF and its officers. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the frontline police were aware of the positive benefits of exercise but felt that the NSWPF failed to recognise its importance:

“I recently had a break from exercise and noticed the difference in my behaviour and mood. However this is still not recognised by the Police as an organisation. I have no ill feelings to person/s who are 'unfit' however the lack of any fitness standard places extreme stress on those left behind. Those on long term sick are not replaced and we are left behind to pick up the slack.”

The first two officers quoted above find time to exercise outside work, which may be more difficult for officers in busy or understaffed LACs, and which also highlights an inconsistency in the experiences of officers with regard to rostering, staffing levels, and overtime. One participant recommended that to ensure that police officers exercise, NSWPF should provide the opportunity to engage in physical activity while on duty rather than relying on them doing it before or after a long shift:

“If the NSWPF could formulate a method of allowing staff to complete some training whilst on duty, not only would they see the long-term benefits with resilience, but also general health and improve staff performance in the field and no doubt find it will also reduce the levels of HOD claims from injuries suffered in the field due to improved fitness. The long-term financial, health, and mental benefits may well be worth investigating.”

Data analysis of the open-ended survey produced numerous recommendations from officers in relation to building physical activity into the job in order to reduce the amount of leave taken by officers, including:

“A rostered exercise day, at least once every 3 months to keep fitness and motivational level on the up and courses on fitness and healthy eating run with PT instructors”; “free gym memberships and consultations with doctors, PT's, nutritionists etc.”

Of course initiatives such as these would involve a short-term financial cost to the NSWPF, something which participants were aware of but believed was worth it:

“[The NSWPF] need to recognise that police suffer fatigue/chronic fatigue and allow extra funding in the LAC’s budget to help overcome the issues ...I believe that [initiatives such as free gym memberships etc.] will actually reduce sick leave, whether it be short or long-term, HOD’s and people being placed on restricted duties. An initiative like this will save the NSWPF money in the long-term.”

E. PROMOTING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

5.5.8 WORKFORCE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

In 2012, the NSWPF implemented the Workforce Improvement Program to provide improved and focussed ongoing support to their employees. Program improvements focus on the psychological and physiological well-being of staff and encompass improved support services such as the EAP, peer support officers, Physical Training Instructors, health checks, resilience training seminars, and recover at work programs. Long-serving employees spoke positively about the increase in support these programs provided and felt that they were successful in changing the police culture regarding attitudes toward psychological distress. Participants commented on the positive changes within the NSWPF over the last decade:

“Yeah, it’s pretty good actually. That’s only changed in the last 10 years though. Previous to that it was taboo”.

Recommendation E.1:

Building on research advances and new successful strategies being employed by NSWPF, resources may be created to train officers to develop well-being and resilience, including consideration of developing positive computing apps, in consultation with end-users that encourage and prompt regular and ongoing well-being activities (Calvo & Peters, 2014).

New figures released in a recent report from the Australian National Coronial Information System (NCIS, 2015) reveal that one emergency worker commits suicide every six weeks in Australia. The report also reveals that these suicide rates are more than three times higher among police officers than among paramedics and firefighters. These figures are thought to be underestimated as in many cases the suicides of former police officers were not officially recognised (Verity & Whitfield, 2014), something that was confirmed by the NCIS (2015). Of those that suicided only a very small percentage were receiving treatment or were formally diagnosed with depression, this trend being particularly apparent among the police. There was a strong perception among participants in this research that there is an overall lack of support for frontline officers (77.5% of interview participants and the most mentioned survey response). This includes a lack of psychological and physical support, support for officers on leave, and organisational support through management and procedures.

Research has shown that more police officers are killed by ‘unintended adverse events’ than during the commission of felonies, and it is suspected that sleep deprivation and fatigue plays an important role in the intentional injury and death of police officers, although this is yet to be adequately researched (Vila, 2006). What is clear from previous research and the data presented here is that poor sleep quality and quantity can affect police officers’ health, safety, and performance outcomes. Many participants indicated that they had come to accept disrupted sleep as part of the job.

“I don’t consider that I sleep well anyway, I do have bad dreams, I do wake up. I do relive incidents...I regularly wake up three, four, five times during the night.”

“I’m not a very good sleeper and that sort of...annoys my wife, because I’m always tired, so I’m always whingey, and I’m up half the night a lot of the time.”

A study conducted with police across North America and Canada found that 40.4% (N=4,957) of officers screened positive for a least one sleep disorder (e.g., insomnia, shift-work disorder) and 56% admitted to nodding off or falling asleep whilst driving (Rajaratnam et al., 2011). The study also found that those testing positive for a sleep disorder were more likely to: make significant administrative errors; fall asleep while driving; make errors or commit safety violations due to fatigue; have uncontrolled anger toward a citizen or suspect; incur citizen complaints; be absent from work; and fall asleep during meetings. Sustained wakefulness studies have equated the levels of cognitive impairment resulting from lack of sleep with increased Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) and warn of the related cumulative increases in cognitive impairment from initial and subsequent shifts in a shift cycle (Knauth, 1996). Considering the nature of police work and need for attention, concentration and the ability to react quickly in ambiguous and often dangerous situations, screening for chronic sleep deprivation and fatigue among officers is an important component of well-being support.

As noted, exposure to traumatic events within policing is high, and frequent exposure may induce maladaptive responses over time in what has been termed “creeping trauma” (Winwood et al., 2009). One participant described such trauma as a gradual ‘wearing down’:

“Operational police are subject to a barrage of psychological trauma during their career as a part of their day to day duties. Over time this barrage will wear down even the most well-adjusted individuals, even those with strong support networks outside the NSWPF.”

McFarlane (2010) argues that one of the greatest challenges in the field of traumatic stress is that many individuals who coped at the time of exposure became unwell at a later date. One participant described an internal conflict as *“just one thing too often, one thing too much”* which caused the trauma of 19 years of policing to surface.

According to Ratey and Hagerman (2008) the mind is so powerful that we can set off the stress response just by imagining ourselves in a threatening situation. This type of anticipatory stress was commonly reported in the interviews:

“Obviously, it's always, just still there. The constant apprehension ... that a violent confrontation is about to occur.”

And

“I'm out here driving around, driving, putting my life on the line when I'm driving, lights and sirens, flying down a street some idiot could come out and I could be dead...I'm going there and the next minute I could not exist.”

In addition to the threat of immediate injury, others such as needle-stick injuries or other exposures to communicable disease where the full ramifications of the injury took time to resolve were reported as being particular stressors that required particular attention due to the long period of worry. From some responses it was apparent that some officers feel angry and helpless over these particular risks, and have a perception of unfairness about the difference between their responsibility and that of the perpetrators.

“I don't want to get hepatitis or frigging AIDS checks every frigging three months because some dickhead decided that spitting on a cop would be fun. ... If you beat that person up a little bit too much well no, how about if someone spat AIDS in your face? How would you feel? You feel...so angry but then we turn around and have to walk away, wash it off and then you sit there and you sit at home and you're so scared.”

In contrast, other responses demonstrated resilience to occupational stressors that allowed officers to manage their reactions in a healthy way that, in the end, protected themselves and the public from unnecessary harm:

“There's no point in me butting heads with these crazy people because they're not taken care of in the judiciary system so why should I risk my family, my life, treating them poorly?”

The continuing implementation of mechanisms to support resilience in the face of such anticipatory stresses can benefit not only individual officers but also their colleagues, families, and the public by reducing the likelihood of disproportionately aggressive responses to everyday interactions.

Overwhelmingly, as suggested by the comments on working in the Child Protection Unit in **Error! Reference source not found.**, the majority of participants agreed that deaths or sexual assaults on children were the most difficult to deal with and had the greatest impact psychologically. Officers that were parents themselves found these situations even more difficult, as they were not as able to ‘distance’ themselves as effectively as part of their coping mechanism (see **Error! Reference source not found.**):

“I've had to go to three significant child deaths over my career, of kids say between five and one. The unfortunate thing at each time, I've had a child of similar age and that has had a real dramatic effect. It just makes you really appreciate what you've got a lot more. But also you just really feel for the loss that the parents are going through when they do it...That really does affect you greatly.”

The ‘Welfare Register’ discussed in **Error! Reference source not found.** is an important factor in ensuring that exposure to such incidents is distributed, but it may also indicate that officers attending incidents involving children require particular attention in terms of access to services such as counselling (whether in the organisation or outside it, through their GP), and that vigilance around this is a part of good leadership, as suggested in **Error! Reference source not found.**. As noted in **Error! Reference source not found.**, physical exercise is a significant protective factor, and benefits extend to anticipatory stress in that the data showed that PTSD symptoms such as hyper vigilance were also reduced. As one officer put it:

“If police aren't doing those positive things like exercising and debriefing, there'll be no cop over a standard period of time that doesn't cave in...PTSD is a real thing.”

The current research also suggested that many officers were using unsustainable levels of overwork itself as a coping mechanism. One officer suffering from PTSD stated that he worked two jobs to avoid being alone with his thoughts:

“I hate being off during the day, at home by myself because that's when it starts to kick in. If you're constantly busy or constantly around people it doesn't bite you.”

There was also a fear among some participants that if they took a break or extended leave due to stress or trauma it would make it much more challenging returning to the job. Instead they pushed themselves to go to work even when they found this difficult as explained in the quote below:

“I always had it in the back of my mind, if I had one day off with stress, it would take me a week to come back in. If I had a week off, it would take me a month to come back in. If I ended up having a month off, that was the end of me. I think that frightened me, so I kept coming in through the worst.”

In contrast to using constant work as an avoidance technique, almost half of the participants expressed the opposite, stating that the best thing they could do when they were feeling overwhelmed emotionally and physically by the job was to take leave from work for time to relax and take a step back, allowing them to return to work refreshed and more physically and psychologically healthy.

5.5.9 WELFARE REGISTERS

Recommendation E.2:

Management practices could be enhanced to provide a more systematic and extended use of strategies to share the psychological load of 'traumatic' incidents among police officers. This could include enhancement of the 'welfare register' used in some commands to identify officers who have gone through similar traumatic incidents to provide support to other officers.

Recommendation E.3

More frequent rotation of those dealing with crimes against children should also be considered and placements made with sensitive consideration of previous experiences (e.g., not transferring personnel to roles where they will still be subject to the same kind of stressors). It is acknowledged that such transfers may contribute to a loss of expertise but the research indicates that the long-term physical and psychological benefits of providing staff with regular respite from particularly stressful units will outweigh the temporary costs.

"You've got to take each job as it comes and sometimes you're just the unlucky one who's going to be stuck with a particular job that's going to really tear at you. Sometimes you're unlucky to get too many of those in a row. You're having enough trouble dealing with one and then all of a sudden it's compounded. Then it can be compounded again. You just think - it's just too much. That's what brought me unstuck."

In commands that were considered 'caring' the mental health of employees was actively monitored for the number of traumatic incidents each employee attends:

"[We have a] welfare register so we keep note of who's attended what we would classify as traumatic incidents. ... Then for example I may say to the supervisor on look, if anything like this comes over that officer is not to attend. They've seen enough for this time period. Give them a rest from it, someone else needs to go to this job."

Frequent exposure to traumatic incidents can result in police officers being diagnosed with PTSD. Participants regularly described the policing profession and PTSD as "going hand in hand". The risk of suffering from PTSD increases dramatically when police are exposed to multiple fatalities and other disturbing incidents over relatively short periods of time (Green, 2004).

While many LACs have in place a welfare register, as noted above, the data showed that this mechanism was not used effectively across all commands, and this presents an opportunity for the good practice being used in many LACs to be extended across the organisation. One detailed response indicated that better use of the welfare register also offers the opportunity for the command culture to become more sensitive to the psychological risks of over-exposure to critical incidents, given that one common coping mechanism is to attempt to make light of the worst situations (see also **Error! Reference source not found.**):

"An instance I can share with you is a certain constable (or senior constable now) where she experienced a high amount of fatalities that she went to and some nasty deceased ... I'm talking way above the batting average of most cops in their careers ... I think in her probationary period she'd seen something like eight fatals and I don't know too many pros that had seen that many fatals in their career. Once she got her stripe then she was just baby deaths, young kids, a lot more. It became a bit of a joke until people realised it was affecting her...it was the joke that if she's on duty tell your friends not to enter the command because there's a good chance someone was going to die nasty in that timeframe. So that got to her as well."

Police officers also reported using a range of coping mechanisms, which are shown in order of frequency in Figure 4 and are discussed below.

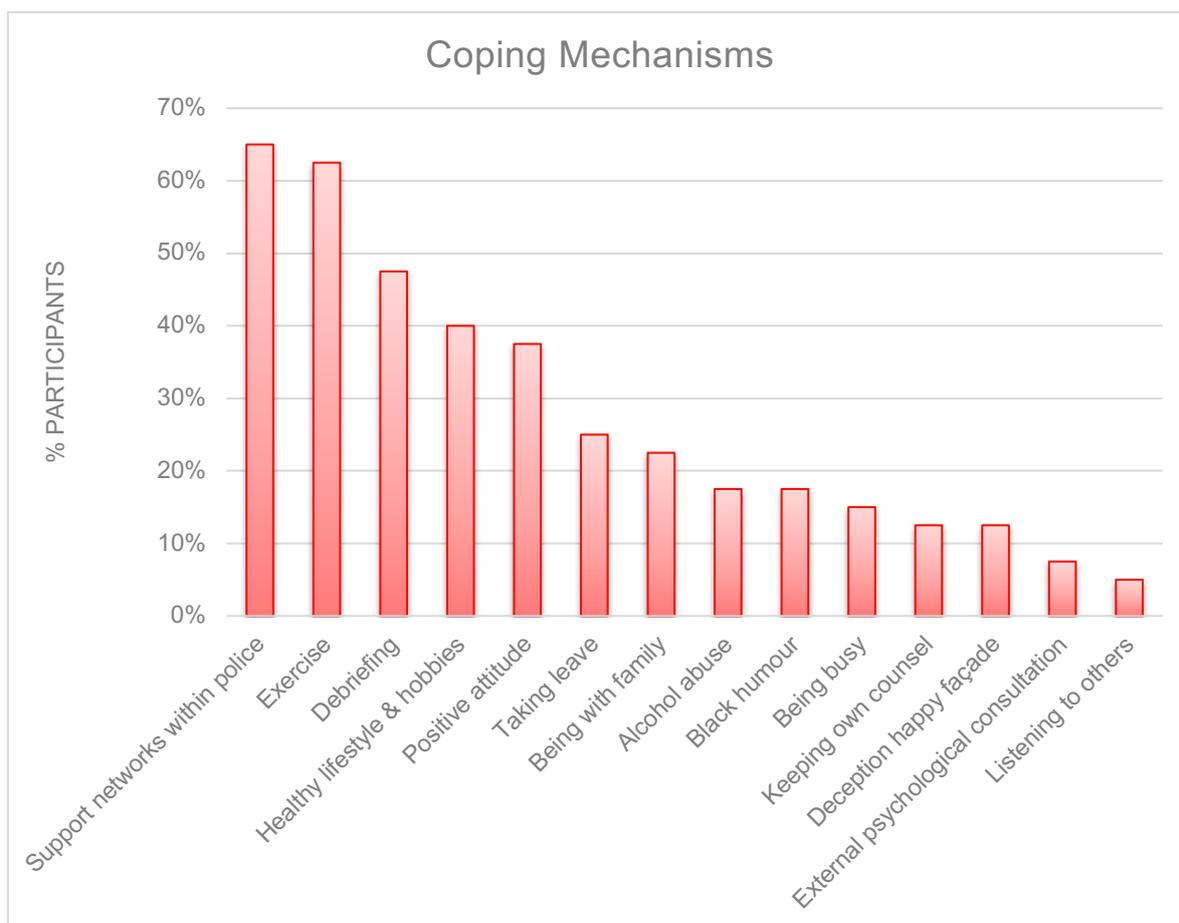


Figure 4: Coping Mechanisms employed by members of NSWPF

5.5.10 ALCOHOL AS A COPING MECHANISM

Research has shown that alcohol abuse and dependence is a serious and widespread problem among police officers (Willman, 2012), with some studies estimating that almost a quarter of all law enforcement officers are afflicted (Swatt et al., 2007). In the current study, almost a fifth of all participants (a figure which may well be under-reported) reported a reliance on alcohol to relieve stress, often as part of socialising:

“Like a lot of police officers you’d seek a bit of comfort in the bottle and things like that ... I think a lot of them seek that help in the bottle to maybe just to de-stress to go out have a talk with your mates over a couple of beers and all that sort of thing.” (Senior Constable, 2014).

Nevertheless, as alluded to in the above quote, it may be that getting together with colleagues and actually talking with people relieves the stress rather than the drinking itself. Nevertheless, most of the officers interviewed did not see a problem in using alcohol as a coping mechanism and joked about its effectiveness, likening it to a visit to the doctor:

“It’s a standard joke with how do you deal with stress? Go and see Dr Reschs.” (Detective Senior Constable, 2014).

5.5.11 COUNSELLING AND PROFESSIONAL HELP

Recommendation E.4:

Police officers expressed a reluctance to utilise the internal EAP services, due to a perceived lack of quality and a concern for lack of confidentiality. It is recommended that NSWPF promote the professionalism and confidential nature of the service and offer staff access to independent and confidential psychological counselling of their choice.

The issues of stress in law enforcement has been given a lot of attention in terms of its impact on individual officers, however, the research on how police work effects an officer's personal relationships with family and friends remains scarce. What the research does tell us is that policing involves unique and ongoing stresses which in turn have the potential to place strain on marriages and family life (Alexander & Walker, 1996). Research has found that some police officers are reluctant to share their work-related problems with their spouses, as commonly reported in the current study:

"[I deal] by closing up, not talking. Of course my wife would say, well what's up? I don't want to talk about it. So you tend to keep it bottled up."

Many participants felt that the additional burden on their partners around childcare, family events and the running of the household (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) also meant that it was unfair for them to also share their work experiences. As one participant commented, *"She's been mainly the one that deals with that side of things and I thought well I'm not going to burden her with my crap."*

A number of participants said they preferred to speak to other police officers rather than their partners, which may compound avoidance of sharing with a spouse and lead to relationship stress and communication problems:

"... it tends to put a lot of strain on other relationships because you develop that type of relationship [with people at work] because they can understand you better...[than] your partner."

Some participants also reported that spouses became jealous and suspicious, which may increase the risk of marital breakdown (see also 3.3.3 for additional stressors related to unpredictable shift patterns).

There was evidence that for some officers the tendency to 'bottle up' developed over time, perhaps suggesting that with appropriate professional support (and perhaps for spouses as well, though this is outside the scope of the present research) officers can remain able to 'debrief' and access social and/or professional psychological assistance.

"At the beginning yes, [I did talk about work] as every probationary constable will. They'll come home, this is what I did dad, I saw this and it was awesome. Then after a while it's like you don't want to know what I did at work, you don't want to know that."

This participant also suggested that talking about experiences on the job meant having to *"relive everything trying to explain"*, which again points to the importance of access to counsellors or other professionals that officers feel able to talk to because they will not feel they are 'burdening' that person and that they have a safe environment in which to share traumatic experiences.

The benefits of maintaining open communication outside the force was reinforced in this research, with participants frequently reporting that talking about a work related event to a spouse or friend, rather than 'bottling it up', was an extremely effective coping mechanism:

"I suppose what helps me cope is I'm always talking to people about it, not so much names and addresses and stuff like that ... It can be anything from the job to internal politics to whatever, and just talking to someone definitely helps your level of sanity."

This factor is important for both officer well-being and also work effectiveness. Borum and Philpot (1993) note that a build-up of contained emotion can result in displaced anger, and this was supported by the data collected in the current study. As one participant commented,

“...because you can't be seen to be stressed at work, [we] take it out on our families or closest friends or whoever's there”.

Some participants reported that while they were aware of this tendency, they were unable to manage or control it.

“I don't want to come home and argue especially when I come to work and I argue with people in the street ... I see what it does to families here so you go home and it makes you angry because you're angry and then you get angry about being angry”

Learning techniques that build coping mechanisms to manage responses to work stressors is also an important benefit of effective professional psychological support. Such coping mechanisms can be remarkably simple, as one officer's technique shows:

“I just come to work, do my stuff and then once I've taken my shirt off, that's it, it stays at work ... I just switch off now which I used to not do.”

This research, however, also strongly suggested that there was an over-reliance on informal support networks because the internal support mechanisms were not trusted. This factor is covered in **Error! Reference source not found.**

F. MANAGING WORKLOAD TO SUPPORT WELL-BEING

Recommendation F.1

Research participants requested a review of the Flexible Rostering Guidelines to reinforce the best aspects of the Guidelines and to remove those which are perceived as detrimental to well-being. Perhaps a survey of all officers as to what they required could inform preparation of new guidelines.

Recommendation F.2:

Research participants' responses suggested that the 'block' and 'non-block' 12-hour shift workplace practices could benefit from review in order to ensure frontline police safety and productivity on duty.

In general, shift-work was not viewed so much as a major problem as it was an expected part of the job. However, long shifts, along with inconsistent, variable and short-notice roster changes appear to be a major source of angst for police officers and their families. In 1995, the NSWPF replaced the traditional eight-hour roster with flexible rosters (Auditor General, 2007). However, few elements of the 1995 flexible roster model are still in practice in the NSWPF. The data revealed that the current rosters are neither consistent with the flexible roster model nor represent best practice (see also **Error! Reference source not found.** for the impact of unpredictable rostering on social support).

It is understood the NSW government proposed 12 hour shifts as a cost-saving measure. A substantial salary increase and more days off over a roster cycle appealed to the majority of staff and was endorsed by PANSW (under block rosters, police work 19 days out of 42). On the surface this would appear to be a win-win situation for all concerned. But subsequent research and the steady and significant increase in workers' compensation leave suggests this is no longer a sustainable model. Furthermore, the data collected in this study reveals that a reluctance to work overtime, diminished social activities, and lack of time to exercise is also attributed to the 12-hour shift. In sum, there was consensus among the participants in the current research that 12 hour shifts are 'stressful, unhealthy and unsafe.'

Approximately half of all interview participants mentioned understaffing, especially at the frontline, as an issue. It was viewed as a contributory factor to many problems such as work-related stress and fatigue.

The interview data revealed that there appears to be a lack of relief staff for those on maternity, sick, stress, or other leave:

"I've been surviving here on five [officers]. I've been down to having two police cover the entire area of this command. That went on for about two years. When you say the police here have been stressed, they've been stressed for a long time."

Understaffing was also seen to result in poor customer service which in turn gives rise to customer complaints and further stress upon attending officers:

"We get the blame for all of this when there's only maybe two or one car or three cars out on the road. ... We're the ones who get the beating all the time."

Also contributing to a high workload and understaffing was the amalgamation of commands. Almost a third of participants reported a negative attitude toward the amalgamation and felt that the organisation failed to provide the necessary resources or staff for the merger thereby increasing the risk to the well-being of their employees:

"The organisation did not take into account the impact of the additional workload placed upon employees and how it has impacted on their health and well-being. No additional resources (people) taken into consideration when structuring the new amalgamated Command."

Many participants talked about the pressures of competing demands between the operational and administration aspects of the job, as well as and push from supervisors to complete the endless series of tasks that often felt insurmountable:

"So you've got this string of deadlines then in addition to all those things that are coming through, there's also huge push by the direct supervisors to get to those jobs that are being broadcast that are on the road at the moment."

Long-serving officers claimed that workload demands had become greater over time:

"15 years ago, 20 years ago didn't do half of what the sergeants today do. Inspectors back then didn't do half of what we do now."

The increased workload and excessive hours required to keep up with it often resulted in some officers, particularly officers in general duties, working overtime without pay. Some participants did not feel that their extra effort was valued but rather something that was simply expected:

"I'd spend four, five hours' overtime or coming in at four am when I started at six am then leaving at eight am ... no-one acknowledges that, no-one lets you have extra pay."

Research conducted by Jakubauskas and Wright (2012) revealed that NSW police officers who frequently worked extra hours or overtime were significantly more likely to suffer from job overload or burnout (approximately 40% of the NSW police force). They also found physical pain, stress, fatigue, sleeping problems, anxiety, and irritability were also more likely to be reported by officers who experienced burnout than those who did not.

Responses also suggested that those working in the busier commands felt that staffing levels were inequitable and didn't adequately reflect the workload of each command, contributing to workplace stress:

"We could do with another three or four coppers easily. We just printed off a ratio thing within command...and our workload, it's like nearly double [another de-identified regional command] workload and they've got three or four times the amount of staff as us."

Ensuring that staffing levels reflect a LACs workload is an opportunity for the NSWPF to support the well-being of officers in busy and challenging commands. As this participant remarked:

“You get to a point where staff are required to be virtually on the job seven days a week and every weekend. It gets people down. That’s when the morale goes down and that’s when they start taking a lot of sick leave and a lot of leave.”

5.5.12 FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR DISPARATE COMMANDS AND UNITS

Recommendation F.3

Research participants recommended better transfer and mobility guidelines to meet changing demands across Local Area Commands. There should be the ability to recognise that some commands are ‘high volume’ at all times or at particular times and require extra police to meet demands. There should be the ability to temporarily rotate officers to meet high demand periods at Local Area Commands.

Recommendation F.4

Further to recommendation 6.3; given that understaffing at the frontline gives rise to ‘exponential’ problems such as high workload and stress, the introduction of a ‘relieving cells’ concept may alleviate the occurrence of additional staff burnout. A comparison of the costs associated with such relieving cells against the exponential nature of staff burnout may be a worthwhile exercise.

The data suggested strongly that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to well-being across the organisation may not be appropriate, and that support mechanisms would need flexibility to allow for differences in stressors between commands and units.

It became clear from the data that some departments faced more stressful events and higher workloads than others, and officers could find that while their coping mechanisms were successful in their previous unit, stress levels often became unmanageable if they moved to a more emotionally and physically demanding unit. Officers working in Child Protection Units reported feeling the most vulnerable:

“It all stemmed back to, I suppose doing child protection was the trigger. It was the thing that finally wore me down and had the breaking point.”

Many participants saw the ability to emotionally distance themselves from the victim as a necessary part of the job and for the most part an effective self defence mechanism:

“I guess, like I said, I can always - I’ve always been able to separate myself and it’s not being cold, it’s just being I suppose cautious for my sake. But I’ve been able to separate because I haven’t had a connection with the individual.”

As the quote above suggests, not having a ‘connection’ with the individual is part of their ability to ‘separate’ themselves in order to deal with the incident. While this type of depersonalisation may be beneficial in the short-term, research shows that depersonalisation is one of the three dimensions of job burnout (Alcorn & Petrie, 2001) and one of the major causes of alcohol abuse (Bonifacio, 1991). As the police force train their police to be emotionally unengaged, they also need to monitor this closely to ensure that officers are not suppressing their normal emotional responses in other facets of their lives, and make sure each has a debrief after a traumatic experience in order to acknowledge their emotions rather than repressing them after the event.

Officers working in rural towns reported a higher incidence of attending a critical incident involving someone they knew, which created additional anxiety. As one rural officer explained, when he is called to a death, two questions immediately come to mind:

“One, is it one of my own, as far as family? I suppose that comes with the territory of having all your family in one town and that sort of thing, and two, is it someone I know, either from

work or outside of work, other than family? ... that's probably the big thing, family, friends, people you know."

The quality of leadership is very variable between commands, and this has significant impact on the well-being and motivation of the officers serving at those LACs.

Moving from a relatively quiet LAC to a busier and more demanding one, or into a specialist unit can involve an adjustment to new stressors and workload management, and this emerged as an area in which leadership and management support are important. One participant's response suggested that such support is not always forthcoming:

"I was talking to the sergeant downstairs yesterday; he has been in a little alcove hidden in New South Wales where if you had one job a day you'd probably be overworked. People get used to that and now they're actually being exposed to what happens with the rest of New South Wales, where you actually are constantly on the run and you are under pressure to perform. Basically I told him to suck it up."

Finally, a clear division was reported between sworn and unsworn staff, and an almost adversarial division between general duty officers and detectives and senior management. Although a small sample of unsworn staff were interviewed (2 from 40 interviews or 5%), informal discussions with other staff, during visits to LACs, reinforced a belief that *"they are often forgotten"*:

"... they think we're just a pleb, even the new probationary constables don't understand my rank or my experience...they see sworn and unsworn."

Responses suggested that differences between units, teams, and other groupings within the NSWPF amounted to 'siloes', and that there was a need for people from different areas to spend time working with one another to reduce antagonism:

"... it's like sibling rivalry between general duties and TAG or general duties and detectives or general duties and highway or CMU and detectives ... Everyone thinks that everyone else is not doing what they're supposed to do. It's good when other people come up to relieve because they get to see what work is actually being done instead of just saying 'what are they doing?'"

5.5.13 WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Recommendation F.5:

Further to recommendation 6.2, research participants requested that, where possible, the NSWPF introduce more flexible rostering practices with earlier notices of the shift cycle, which may allow police officers to satisfy their personal responsibilities and maintain a more stable work-life balance.

As noted in **Error! Reference source not found.**, the present system of 12 hour plus shifts, frequent and last minute shift changes, and working at atypical times was seen as detrimental to a police officer's social life, and thus to their ability to establish a healthy work/life balance with effective 'down time' from the job. A poor work/life balance and over-commitment to the job was recognised by some participants as a contributing factor in psychological injury:

"The job, it has an impact on you. You throw yourself into it, it will consume you ... I was diagnosed with the dreaded PTSD back in 2003...That work/life balance, I admit I suffer with that. Very committed to what I do ... It doesn't always make things easy and it does add other pressures."

Research on how police work affects an officer's personal relationships with family and friends remains scarce. What the research does tell us is that policing inherently involves unique and ongoing stresses

which in turn have the potential to place strain on marriages and family life (see also **Error! Reference source not found.**). The data collected in this research suggested strongly that this is compounded by unpredictable and long shifts. As one participant stated:

“The families of police are the ones that really a lot of times struggle, do it hard, and get stuffed around so much. It’s like, it’s easy for a boss to change a roster, just by the flick of a pen, and operational needs ... but forget about the family side of someone’s life ... It’s not a family-orientated job at all.”

As the quote above implies, rostering issues may sometimes be a product of supervisory decision-making. Some participants who gave positive feedback on their supervisors noted that they were understanding of family obligations outside of work and were happy to be flexible:

“I lived just over an hour away but if there was a crash on the freeway or the fires started, the commander would come in and say [de-identified], go home now, you’re covered.”

Conversely, and again demonstrating that there is significant difference in leadership between commands, one participant reported that his/her supervisor was inflexible, and the irritation in this case is clearly shown in the quote below:

“I had a funeral on today ... I asked if I could just have the morning off and then continue the work at [a closer LAC] instead of having to travel back. Anyway, I got told, it’s a bit late notice. So I sent a memo back stating, well I’m sorry, I’ll go around and ask all my family to give me a time and date when they’re going to die so I can give the New South Wales Police Force a heads-up.”

More predictable rostering is a key factor that could support a police officer’s well-being, and presents an opportunity for NSWPF to implement changes to accommodate the important social and familial interactions that can help maintain a healthy work/life balance and thus counteract being overwhelmed and job burnout.

G. REFINING PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Recommendation G.1

Participants in the study emphasised the need for the NSW Police Force and insurance companies to work to strict guidelines in relation to dealing with injured officers, including the administration of follow-up investigations and surveillance programs. In this regard, there is a need to ensure a cohesive and unified approach, including effective communication with injured employees, by the NSW Police Force, EAP, and insurer – focusing upon a more individually orientated service. Failure to do this is a factor which exacerbates psychological injuries. There is a need to continue to reduce the stigmatisation of stress related injuries, ensuring that the workplace provides a respectful and caring environment.

Recommendation G.2:

NSWPF management practices include strategies to appropriately deploy restricted duties staff so that they can be included in the team, and can see and feel that they are making a significant contribution. This could include attending incidents after first response police to collect information, update reports, and take statements to work as an integral team member.

Recommendation G.3:

Further exploration is needed into ways to reduce the amount of paperwork and ‘double and triple ups’ in reporting (e.g., notebook reports, computer reports, SITREPS and Reps all outlining the same thing).

5.5.14 PAPERWORK

Frontline officers reported that they experienced additional occupational stress from the sheer volume of meticulous record-keeping and paperwork required:

“... every morning or every night I'd wake up, I'd have that little sick feeling because I'd just think of all the work I have to do, but once you get in, you start trying to work on your stuff, you muck around with your friends and stuff, it alleviates that but as soon as you leave you're still going, oh my God I've got all that stuff to do, I have to do that statement, I have to do that paperwork. It's a lot more stressful.”

Furthermore, the sheer amount of paper work was seen as a deterrent for staying in the job long-term as participants in this study claimed that many “street-wise” police officers leave because of the amount of paperwork they need to do every day in the job:

“You see a lot of very, very good street coppers that if you try to ask them to put a report together it's just a disaster but put them out there to sort anything out and they're fantastic. When it's the other side of the coin it'll get them in a lot of trouble. It's always the paperwork that will let you down.”

As noted in **Error! Reference source not found.** above, among the indicators of ‘caring commands’ was being “given assistance to complete tasks on time”, which suggests there is an opportunity here for NSWPF to identify the management practices (and perhaps staffing levels, as noted in **Error! Reference source not found.**) that help to reduce the organisational stressors arising from paperwork.

Reducing bureaucracy and red tape decreases workload for frontline police and thus helps to alleviate work-related stress. As many police officers pointed out in the interview and surveys, an integral part of this is to streamline and allow more time for paperwork. It is understood that a great deal of work has been undertaken by the NSWPF to cut the duplication of detail gathering and streamline the reporting processes, however, from the feedback received throughout the interview process, it is clear that there is a great deal more to be done.

5.5.15 COMPLAINTS

Recommendation G.4:

To ensure fairness, investigation of internal complaints could be better conducted by independent officers rather than officers who work with the subject of the complaint.

Recommendation G.5

Participants felt strongly that the time taken to investigate internal complaints needs to be reduced dramatically.

Recommendation G.6:

Participants who were, or had been, under investigation stated that they needed to be regularly informed on the progress of the investigation and given the benefit of the doubt by co-workers. Police officers may suffer from less stress if they are given a reasonable amount of information about the investigation and not assumed guilty until being proven innocent.

Policing inevitably involves dealing with angry and traumatised people, which can lead to unfounded complaints from the public:

“I've had numerous made against me over the years, which I know were done for no other reason than to try and affect the way that I was doing business against those people, especially when I was a licensing sergeant.”

While complaints of this nature from the public are inherent in the job, participants noted that the stress of external complaints combined with an unsupportive complaint management process can create a great deal of stress and personal hardship:

“I’ve been caught in this situation many a times where you know what’s being said about you is bullshit, but because you’re being investigated you’re tied by the Police Service Act, the bloody complaints management system that you can’t disclose anything. You can’t defend yourself. That’s really bad.”

Participants perceived there to be lack of fairness in terms of how external complaints are dealt with internally. Officers reported that often the voice of the community is heard more than the voice of the police officers against whom the complaints were made.

Sometimes customer complaints result in lawsuits against police officers and in some instances may end an officer’s career. Nevertheless, it was felt that acting upon complaints with no reasonable evidence, the slow investigation process, and investigating complaints which could have been dealt with at a lower level impacted on the well-being of the police officer under investigation, who may have been placed on restricted duties, but also of the investigating officer. In both cases, it was felt that the time and resources consumed by the existing complaints process could be better utilised.

The research showed that those that were involved with workplace interpersonal conflict or bullying at their commands and subsequently reported the incident/s found that they received very little support from the organisation:

“I find that there is a lack of support for officer’s who are being harassed or bullied whether it is verbal or sexual and the organisation will not support these people. There is a large amount of victimisation and this does not change.”

Not only did participants report a lack of support for the victims of bullying, some reported that reporting such behaviour could compound, rather than alleviate, the problem.

“I have seen bullying of others and reported that bullying (as per the policy) and all I got was the bullying turned onto myself for actually caring for others. This organisation does not support people doing the right thing. If you speak out, give your workplace a bad name etc. you are punished.”

The internal conflicts between employees, as discussed above, sometimes escalated to a point where internal complaints were officially lodged against another co-worker. Staff believed that they were mostly unnecessary and could be dealt with through a supervisor rather than making an official complaint. Internal workplace complaints were also viewed as another cause of decreased morale and reduced cohesion in the workplace:

“The internal complaint system is a joke and the biggest killer of morale in the NSWPF. ... Most of these complaints could be easily targeted at a direct supervisor level instead of the “on paper” investigations. We are all on the same team.”

Apart from being investigated by colleagues whom work closely with them, another major detrimental aspect of the process was that the subject police officer is often uninformed and not consulted with respect to complaints against them:

“I am currently working through a work place complaint. Within the NSW Police Force the majority of complaints are internal complaints and I don’t believe that these complaints are being managed appropriately. Currently subject officers of complaints are left out of the loop and do not know what is occurring with complaints against them for months on end.”

According to the *Effective Critical Incident Investigation and Police Oversight, Submission by the Police Association of New South Wales, 2013*, NSWPF now has far greater transparency – ‘Before there was cover up, now there is cooperation’. This is demonstrated by the increase in the number of internal police complaints. The Ombudsman 2011-12 Annual Report stated that 37% of the total complaints about police officers were made by other police officers. Worthy of note is that 34% of total allegations did not require any further action to be taken by police. There is a belief amongst police officers that an aim of avoiding a recurrence of an incident leading to a complaint is being overshadowed by a demand to lay blame and make findings of wrongful conduct. Of course wrongful conduct should be dealt with. But the investigation of complaints, and the oversight system which scrutinises those investigations, needs to achieve a better balance of these two objectives. That is, many more complaints might be dealt with immediately at the supervisor level, informing both complainants and police officers as quickly as possible that there has been a complaint, and that it has been dealt with.

5.5.16 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Recommendation G.7:

All responses relating to the EAP stressed that it needs to strive to develop and deliver a more comprehensive, high quality, and confidential service that is valued by NSWPF staff.

Participants reported that psychologically injured officers could benefit from more timely, individualised assistance and effective communication from the NSWPF, insurer, and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Currently, the process is viewed by officers interviewed to be a factor which exacerbates the poor psychological health of injured officers.

It was apparent from the responses that the present EAP system is not perceived to be adequate (see also **Error! Reference source not found.**). Issues raised include a narrow focus on work-related issues rather than a more comprehensive approach that examined interconnected issues including the impact of work on home life; a perceived unsatisfactory quality of the EAP; and the view that EAP services were not confidential. For officers in regional and rural areas, isolation was reported as a limiting factor in their ability to access the service at all:

“They were going to organise for me to speak to someone, a psychologist, and just because of the remoteness out here it got a bit too hard and it just fell by the wayside. So I didn’t get to speak to anybody. They said, you could do it over the phone with someone, but I would rather be face-to-face with someone than talk on a phone.”

Some officers felt that the EAP consultations were too narrowly focused on work-related issues. Overall, it was believed that the EAP showed little recognition of connections between work and personal life and this is another reason many officers gave to choose to seek external psychological help as opposed to using EAP services.

Some supervisors reported sending their officers straight to external sources of professional support:

“He was emotional on the phone and I told him to go and see his doctor and seek a mental health plan and go and speak to a psychologist of his choice, someone with experience. If he didn’t want to do that, as a last resort he used the EAP provider - I won’t call it a service...”

Other interview responses also singled out the inexperience of EAP counsellors:

“I go and speak to someone with experience as opposed to a cheap graduate that’s filling an EAP position”.

6. Further Research

In 2015, the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education and the NSW Police Force applied for and succeeded in receiving funding from the Australian Research Council under its Linkage Project Program.

The purpose of the ARC Linkage Project is to generate research-derived strategies for improving NSWPF well-being, resilience, and retention. We propose to:

- Use longitudinal, large-scale modelling to test the effects of psychosocial determinants on key outcomes (e.g., burnout, PTSD, medical leave/retirement, stress, conflict, trauma) and protective factors that mitigate these problems for the retention of new recruits and long-serving officers;
- Test whether there is variation among the 76 NSWPF command units in terms of key outcomes (e.g., well-being; sick leave; medical retirement; retention plans; psychological strengths);
- Identify characteristics of the most successful commands, particularly those that support autonomy (see definition page 10), competence, and collaboration;
- Compare perceptions of new recruits and long serving officers in order to provide a basis for making NSWPF more attractive to the substantial number of new recruits who leave within the first five years of service; and
- Develop a well-validated set of measures for use in the NSWPF and policing research more generally.

By clarifying these issues and offering novel and methodologically sound evidence-based approaches, our research will contribute to ongoing efforts to improve the NSWPF capacity to protect and serve the community, elucidate the psychosocial drivers that seed success in enhancing NSWPF well-being, build Australian human capital by retaining police officers, and enrich and advance the international police research agenda in relation to theory, research, and practice.

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QUALITATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

From Strength to Strength: Furthering NSW Police well-being

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