**Methods of Organizational Research**

**Management 612 Assignment C**

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**Gender Specific Stressors in Law Enforcement: Female Officer’s Stressors**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this pilot study is to research the effects and experience of stress among female law enforcement officers. This research will contribute to the literature of this understudied area in the field of law enforcement. The project focuses on giving insights to the manner in which stressors manifest and the coping mechanisms female law enforcement officers implement to identify and address them in their personal and professional lives.

**Introduction**

In the male –dominated profession of law enforcement there have been generalized assumptions regarding the 11.2% of females working as sworn officers in law enforcement. (National Center for Women & Policing 2002) It is beyond the scope of this project to address each of the issues in depth. To more productively contribute to the available literature, this researcher has focused on the effects of stress symptomology by gender specific (female) coping mechanisms used to identify what “triggers” stress in the female law enforcement officer and how she deals with it on a daily basis.

By conducting interviews with five female law enforcement officers who have collectively served nearly 110 years in law enforcement, this researcher offers the reader significant perspectives shared by those who have first-hand knowledge of being *“on the job”.*

Serving from the unique position of informant, having fourteen years *on the job*, this researcher has provided insight and explanation of what it means; the toll it takes and the price we pay to be a woman in law enforcement.

Literature Review

“The life expectancy of the average American is 77 years. But if this person

is a law enforcement officer, his life expectancy drops to 59 years of age. (Kirschman,1997) Why? Because of stress and its biological reactions, law enforcement officers can expect a myriad of personal, emotional and physical issues to befall them over the course of their careers. It isn’t one component over another that causes undue stress to settle like a heavy cloak over law enforcement officers. It is not just the organization or ‘the job’ or the personal stressors such as the psychological and physical liabilities faced daily. It is the confluence of all these different factors occurring without respite continuously and simultaneously. (Sheehan & Van Hasselt 2003). Cumulative stressors are not to be trivialized or treated with a dismissive rebuke. They contribute to the impact on the physical health resulting in high blood pressure, gastrointestinal disorders and coronary heart disease. Diabetes is one of the most common ailments in law enforcement. The increase in blood sugar experienced during hyper-vigilance is the perfect companion to the lousy eating habits and irregular hours infamous in law enforcement. Alcohol and prescription drug abuse is not at all uncommon as a method employed by those in law enforcement as a way of coping with stress.

Marriage in the law enforcement community pays a heavy cost. If the husband is in law enforcement and the wife is not then they have a 65% chance their marriage will end in divorce. Regular marriages are at best a 50/50 proposition. If both the husband and wife are in law enforcement then the divorce rate climbs to 75%. If the wife is in law enforcement (as I am) and the husband is not then the marriage faces a 100% divorce rate. (Gilmartin 2002) My husband and I just celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary last August. This was not without devotion and determination. Temptation is everywhere but nowhere more available than in a cop’s life. Cops know how to cover their tracks. They love risk and danger. They are human and they make mistakes. It is a daily fight to maintain integrity and fidelity in aspects of character.

So much is already known about what law enforcement officers face. Organizational control structure generates more stress than the content of the actual work itself. We can deal with the criminals. Law enforcement lives in a culture of risk. It is a risk that is trained for, studied for, prepared for the unexpected and be constantly on alert for whatever the shift brings**.** There is no way to know what staff command will come up with next. It’s on a need-to-know basis and the rank and file do not need to be told until staff command is ready for them to know. It is little more than management by ambush.

“Managers who attempt to exert and maintain control over employees cause stressful environments. Supervisors who micromanage, place too much emphasis on structuring and controlling subordinate’s workdays and dictating the only acceptable response to assigned tasks.”

(Sewell 2006). How do we determine steps for managers to reduce the stress they cause and ultimately improve their effectiveness by doing so? Managers need to function as safety valves. By being the emotional pressure release, the effective manager can allow the law enforcement officer to vent anger, frustration and the concerns of the day through appropriate behaviors. Employees respect managers who remember their own rise through the ranks. The managers who remember their roots have the trust and support of those who serve under them.

Work alienation can occur when the expectations of those in power would have those he manages subjugate their values and beliefs for the mindset of the organization. Police cynicism develops from “ a career beginning from a position of enthusiasm, motivation and idealism but the journey over the years produces changes’ according to Dr. Kevin Gilmartin, a retired Pima County Sheriff. He goes on to say,” the veteran officer retiring after 20+years may not even vaguely resemble the positive, highly motivated recruit that began the journey”. No one gets out without harm. The personal investment diminishes as the experience increases. Good officers count the days until they escape. There is a direct correlation between the attitude as it deteriorates and work alienation. The disconnect is most definitely a defense mechanism but less obviously, it is also a stressor in the alienation it creates. There seems to be a correlation drawn between bettering one’s education and the need for autonomy. The more well read and educated one becomes, the more annoyed one becomes. There has to be a conscious effort to avoid victim-based thinking. It sounds ironic that anyone in law enforcement can feel like a victim but it happens. Basing one’s thinking on the mistaken belief that one has no control over one’s personal life- feeling apathetic and blaming others for one’s lack of control – is just the breeding ground needed for mental health issues to become deeply rooted. Cops are a suspicious bunch by nature. Allowing one’s self to dwell on any negative-based thinking can and should be avoided.

Accepting that law enforcement will change who one is becomes the challenge. There is a constant contact with individuals who have been victims. It is human nature, and some would say the nature of a female, to relate to the pain of others. Empathizing with the victim is a natural response. After a period of time on the job a wall builds up in the mind and around the heart to protect the officer from the erosion the pain brings. Women demonstrate a conscious effort to fight off this insulating effect. One must be ever mindful to not let kindness be mistaken for weakness in performance of her duties.

**Hypothesis 1:** Female law enforcement officers will experience and process stressors of the job differently than male law enforcement officers in similar scenarios.

Gender issues in the male dominated profession have not been closely examined. Males experience a greater degree of perceived stress, emotional exhaustion and stressors as a greater dissatisfaction with the work than do females. Perceived stress in females presents as a higher physiological response as ailments, dissatisfaction with co-workers and feelings of emotional exhaustion along with dissatisfaction with the nature of the work. Studies have shown that at any given time as many as 86.3% of officers are thinking of leaving the job. (Boss 1999)

There must be outlets and support without retribution or consequence. The officer has to recognize and give herself permission to confront stress head-on just as she would any threat to the safety and well-being of the public, her loved ones and most importantly the threat to herself.

Law enforcement officers must be aware of their own behavior. They cannot allow themselves to become a ‘*usta’*. (I *usta* do this. I *usta* do that. I *usta* see friends. I *usta* do sports) Stay in touch with friends. Keep a circle of friends that are not in law enforcement. Accept the work is just what you do. It is not who you are. It is a career and nothing more. Learn good time management skills. Practice cool down skills to prevent you from bring the command presences into your home and family life.

**Hypothesis 2:** Similar episodic stress will be assimilated and accommodated differently by gender in a law enforcement organization.

The public is actually quicker to accept a female in patrol than are their male counterparts. Women are no more likely to call for backup. While women officers are slightly less likely to make an arrest, the ones they do make tend to “stick” more often. “Empirical evidence gives females the advantage in dangerous situations because their demeanor is less threatening. Females are likely to calm a potentially violent situation and avoid injury to all the participants.” (Norvell, et al 1993). The skill to diffuse any such volatile scenario belies the turmoil churning below the surface. Bad things don’t go away on their own. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has a lesser known companion or antecedent version of stress. Acute Stress Disorder was recognized in 1994 by the American Psychiatric Association as having short-term patterns of some severe psychological reactions which include re-experiencing trauma via recurring nightmares and intrusive thoughts, avoidance of reminders of the trauma and experiencing a numbing to the point of not having loving (emotional, physical and/or sexual) feelings, sleeping difficulties and hyper-vigilance. (Sheehan et al. 2003)

There have been disappointingly, limited studies that only used male officers. Female officers have all the stressors male officers have plus many others the male officers will never experience. The generalized assumptions regarding “lady cops” carry all sorts of tokenism baggage with them. Sexual harassment is still very real in law enforcement but is often forgiven for the feeling of being *one of the boys.* More often than not it is male officers observing the abuse heaped on females that take more offense to it than the victim herself.

**Hypothesis 3**: Female law enforcement officer’s stressors directly impact their choices in personal relationships, critical life choices and value systems.

There is a differential effect on marital status as it relates to occupational stress. “Men appear to derive a greater psychological health benefit from being married than do women.” (Norvell, et al 1993) According to this research, single women with children are less likely to be depressed than married women with children. Many of the stressors are the same. How they are handled by females in law enforcement is vastly different. The family pays a heavy price for the stressors faced by their loved one in uniform. It needs to be consciously worked out by all members of the family in a struggle for emotional survival. Dr. Ron Holman , advisor to the California Correctional Peace Officers Association warns of the dangers of *Command Presence.* It is a wickedly efficient manner and learned skill of the accomplished officer duringtraining and perfected over time on the job. “Trained to remain calm, hide emotions, appear detached, strong, confident, and not to be crossed makes for a great officer”. It makes for lousy personal relations ships. Emotional survival requires a conscious effort to bring command presence under control by turning it off and removing it from one’s person as much as if it comes off with the uniform. Women in law enforcement may all have come into the career at different stages in their lives but the journey seems to very often end at the same circumstances. There is a cautiousness sometimes perceived as a reluctance to make any commitment that may impact personal or financial security Female law enforcement officers demonstrate an element of hesitation in making choicesinvolving others as demonstrated in the interviews shared in this study.

**Methodology**

This researcher was reluctant initially to approach female law enforcement officers to participate in the qualitative interviews needed for this pilot research study. Being a female law enforcement officer, I am well aware of the hesitancy among us to trust those who wish to document any facet of our profession. I found my first subject for an interview in the person of my mentor from my days in the jail. In asking her, I was overheard by another female deputy who spoke up to say, “I’ve got something to say for your project” It was almost too easy. Any perception I had about hesitations forthcoming were vanishing into thin air. I can only attribute this to my status as informant in the process. It was an endorsement of my effort and fortified my belief that I was focusing on an area of real significance. It bordered on amusing when I made every effort to maintain discretion during my first interview only to be interrupted by a curious female officer wanting to know what we were talking about in private. We resisted the urge to respond, “You.” When it was explained in truthfulness, I suddenly had another willing participant wanting to share her perspective. The same scenario repeated itself less than two hours later providing me with another female law enforcement officer wanting her story to be told. At the outset, I had doubted I would find perhaps but one or two females willing to open up to me. When I shared intentions it was as if I’d sent out a signal. Bolstered in my newly endorsed efforts, I found the confidence to approach two other female officers. The reception I got was as though they were waiting for someone to ask them to tell their stories. It is with equal parts of admiration, honor and respect that I share the thoughts of these five brave women and how they deal with the stressors of being a female in law enforcement.

**K.L.** is 50 years old and a 17yr veteran of a mid-sized county sheriff’s department. She accepted the job following a divorce from an abusive Air Force veteran who was chronically unemployed. The marriage brought three wonderful children into K.L.’s life. The sheriff’s department employed K.L.’s sister (who is now 52 and twice divorced but not part of this study). It was her sister’s employment that drew her to law enforcement. It was an easy transition.

K.L. shares that the most stressful moments on the job “are caused by supervisors and not the job itself. It is the lack of leadership skills of supervisors that make the job hard.” She shared an example of being chewed out in the presence of lawyers and other deputies that gave her stressors that were unnecessary and avoidable. K.L. said the job is completely fine but not when pressure is brought over small things and good efforts go without notice.

K.L. said her health is a big issue for concern and care. “It is important that I eat right and get enough sleep. I have to be strong and to be ready to restrain people at a moment’s notice” Noting that if she had a big day ahead then it was early to bed and no drinking the night before.

She offered that her health affects her family too. “This job wears on your body. It will affect your sleep. It affects your eating habits. It can get out of hand if you’re not careful.” When asked how she leaves work at work, she replied, “ I take it off with the belt and put it in the trunk of my car. When I am at home, I am in the moment. I am at home. I share the day with him and listen to his day.” She stated she liked to show her softer side and just be a woman. He does not like to trade on her being a cop and the few times he did she shut him down. K.L. did say that when she is out with her sister once and came upon a verbal altercation she could not just turn away. Confrontation is as comfortable as an old pair of shoes. She speaks of being taken at her word when she said who she worked for and that she was a deputy. She intervened and quelled the problem without the least hesitation. K.L. said” I could feel my heart racing and my blood pressure shot up but I couldn’t just let it go.” Her sister, the former deputy was amused and commented ‘Can’t leave it at work, can you?” and K.L. admits she will never be accused of failure to act. When at home she wants to ‘forget for awhile’ that she has the vested authority to arrest someone or take a life in the defense of another. She said she had been *with him* for eighteen years and she’d been a deputy seventeen of them. “ I’m not going to marry him until after I retire. Our retirement (IMRF) has a clause that refunds me upwards of $29,000 for being single when I retire. I want that for my kids and not for him if something happens to me. My kids will be the beneficiary of my retirement account. He doesn’t need the money if something happens to me. My kids come first. So I may marry him toward the end. But for now its fine the way it’s been.” This is a conscious choice that many single mothers in law enforcement make for the benefit of their children. It also speaks to the mistrust of the motives of others we let close to us. Asked to define “close” and K.L. said, “I want my family separate from this life- the way I am here. I can’t work with juveniles because it reflects negatively on my kids and how I relate to them. I see it in myself when I am so hard on them. They have told me how mistrustful I am of them when I have been actively working around juvenile delinquency cases. I can handle being in a divorce court room because it has the opposite effect- it makes me treat him more positively and appreciate what he brings to the relationship” As long as it is on her terms, with the limits she sets and the practicality of the financial aspects it can be assimilated into her life. It’s a coping mechanism and accommodates room for love in her life.

“I’m looking forward to getting out of here. I want to work with little kids. They are still moldable and there is still hope. I may even volunteer to work with special kids. It would be good to contribute to someone who will appreciate me without questioning my motives.”

**M.R.** is 42 years old and has worked in law enforcement for 20 years. She was single when she accepted her duties. She has been married for 10 years but has been with the same man for 15yrs.She was already in law enforcement when she met him. He was married to someone else when they met and she did not like him at all, at first. She had no other family member in the field of law enforcement and expressed it was just a job she happened upon. M.R. said,” I never worked in the jail. I have always been in the courthouse and the courtrooms; dealing with people and whatever the day brings.” She went onto say, “You want to know about this job? It sucks. Don’t look to be appreciated by the bosses. And the men? You have a situation- you deal with it and move on! Women can do that but men? They hang onto it for days and rehash it again and again. Let it go.” When asked if she was aware of the studies that support that very position, she said, “ Well, are you surprised? I’m not. Just look at how it goes around here. You and me we may take away the people issue with us and learn for next time but we don’t talk it to death. We move on. They hang on to it. They can’t just deal with it and let go.” Clearly, in her need to restate her point she was demonstrating her annoyance and her support of the studies which say women will perceive stressors from the people involved and men will experience perceived stressors from the situation experienced. It’s the same scenario but processed entirely differently. M.R. said she started her career by working with juveniles. Neglect and abuse cases were ‘so difficult’ for her. She shared,” We were trying to get pregnant. It wasn’t going well. I’m sitting in court on a case where the mother allegedly killed her infant. It ripped my heart out. I melted down and demanded I be moved out of juvenile. I was there because I was a woman. It was tokenism of the worst kind.” There are studies that indicate the stressors we experience as females are based on those limited experiences we are exposed to because of our gender. M.R. agreed with this completely when asked about the validity of the concept.

When asked about the not marrying until her early thirties M.R said she had always been cautious about relationships. “Off-duty is off-duty. I cannot mix the two. I still don’t” She went on to clarify the statement. “We waited a long time for our son. It wasn’t easy and I think the stress of the job had a lot to do with me not getting pregnant. We had to try IV a few times and that was not any kind of fun. I don’t like to be anything but his mother when I am not here. Our son is very selfish of my time when I am with him. He does not want me to show up at his school in uniform. He doesn’t want a big deal made of it that his mom is a cop. He wants me to be his Mom and not someone who others have preconceived ideas about.” I asked her how she keeps them separate. “I put on the job when I put on my uniform. Our son knows I have a gun. He knows it’s no toy. My attitude hardens when I get ready for work. He doesn’t like the no-nonsense approach I take when I get into uniform. He watches his mother disappear.” She was very quiet for a long time and then spoke. “ I can’t wait to get out of here. I just want to do the twenty and get out. The stress wears me out if I let it. The public perception of us is so bad. They think every cop is a crook or an asshole that does nothing but eat donuts. I want to be around kids. They are so undamaged. Around kids I can do some good and make them happy without them thinking of me beyond just being the person there to make them happy.” M.R. spoke of a woman who was in court trying to get her children back from DCFS. She had told M.R. thank you for taking the time to correct her behavior so she made a better impression on the court and ultimately did get her children returned because of M.R.’s advice. M.R. said, “ Do you think that would happen now? I’d be told to F--- off before my advice would be welcome.”

M.R. said, “ I just want to switch gears and get out of here; be The Mom – love my family, my husband and our life together.”

**B.B-S.**  is 51yrs old and has worked in law enforcement for 29 years. She is married for the third and final time. This time around she is married “ to someone in law enforcement just as the first husband was” in pursuit of someone who understands the strain of the job. B.B.S. warns,” It isn’t easy to be a partner to someone in law enforcement. It’s even harder for men. There are plenty of support groups for wives of cops but few for the husbands. (Perin 2009) Communication becomes all the more important.” When delicately asked about the third Mr. BBS she replies,” Stereotypes and challenges abound in the quest for a significant other. Is she the short-haired gruff woman stomping about and being masculine or is she perceived as too feminine to do the job?” Both stereotypes set up a relationship to fail. “Is she the Charlie’s Angel of his fantasies? Is the sexual innuendo anything more than childish nonsense? Once you get past all that how easy is it to sustain a relationship? “It’s real hard to find someone who wants to go on a date at 7am. Unlike most occupations, police work often defines a person in the mind of a potential mate.”

Even further, “There is an odd fascination with women in law enforcement. While you’re dating you’ve got to kind of wade through that. It can be very intimidating for the person who is dating a female cop who carries a gun and has a constitutional authority to take a life.” When taking it to the next level in a relationship BBS says, “ when talking about things they don’t understand and she (we female cops) sees as fun. Normal people don’t understand us and they look at us and think ‘*this girl is a little off’ and I’m not sure I want to be part of her world’.*

Stress on the job can come from being partnered with men. BBS says,” It becomes a big issue in police relationships. There are huge, truly huge, trust issues. It can be hard for a partner (spouse) to handle. As women we are always trying to prove ourselves as equals.” There is a constant effort to keep the proper context of a relationship where it belongs. “We, those of us in law enforcement are naturally suspicious. We are hyper-aware. We are taught from the beginning that the world is a violent place and people want to hurt us. The problem is when you go home you have problems in relationships” Is it any wonder? The best thing we can do for ourselves as females in law enforcement is “to accept the differences between men and women. Women attach feelings to almost everything in their lives. A lot of women don’t let it go of it when the sergeant yells at them they carry it with them (BBS is a sergeant, and female, she knows) for the rest of the shift or even beyond. A guy cop will generally say, Ok Sgt. and learn from it, or get angry about it or just shake it off and move on.”

This relates to what M.R. had said. The words will linger and the people connection will too. But a ‘guy cop’ will remember, not the correction by the sergeant, but the situation that occurred to cause it. This is what MR meant by “they won’t let go of it.”

‘It may be 2009 but women are still fighting for equality and a solid foothold in this profession.”

How do you cope? ‘You can’t expect your spouse/ partner to make all the concessions. That’s what happens a lot. You think’ I’m the one out there risking my life everyday and what are you doing? You’re doing someone’s taxes or working in a safe little job somewhere’.

“ Women in law enforcement have got to understand they have entered a warrior class. It something they have to accept and embrace. Those who come to love you must also be accepted into the warrior family for it affects them as well.”, advised Sgt. BB-S.

**T.R.** is 48 years old and has served in law enforcement 25 years having achieved her Bachelor degree in Law Enforcement and Justice Administration in 1984. She has also served as a hospice and geriatric nurse for the last 15years. The nursing aspect was to please her mother’s desire to have a nurse for a daughter. It has since become a second career and a major source of stress reduction in offset of the work she does daily in law enforcement. T.R. has been divorced for 14 years following her 11 years of marriage. The union blessed her with a daughter who is now 18 years old and preparing for college in the fall. TR had a relationship that lasted four years, with a lawyer who then ended it. He said he could not accept what “she was capable of” in her career.

“Clearly, the biggest stressor in this job is that we are treated like a three year old by the bosses. We are micro-managed to death. They forget what it was like to do this job and then yet given the chance to get in the trenches with us refuse to do what we do daily!” She goes on to vent, “I am given the authority to have every key in this building, to carry a loaded gun, yet I must ask permission to go to the bathroom. I must justify my every move and thought. It is beyond ridiculous.” There is little autonomy and TR is smart enough to realize it.

“ I spent the first part of my career jumping through hoops to stay ahead of inmates and now its management that has me jumping through hoops for them” How does the stress affect you and how do you handle it all? TR responds, “I am so tired. I am mentally worn out from being micro-managed. I am weary. I am tired a lot of the time. When I am at work there is the constant adrenaline of being tuned in to the moment. I get home and I am just weary of it all.” There were tears in her eyes and we both allowed it to be explained as allergies and we moved on with nothing more spoken of it. No words were needed. I know all too well what she felt. It is a moment of indulgence when we can let our guard down in the safety of one who understands without accusation. When asked how well she sleeps she openly laughed and said, “Sleep? What sleep?” and she openly admits “I can fall off to sleep in a matter of seconds if I hold still. It has happened in court during a boring divorce. Don’t you have a magic chair at home? You sit in it and sleep comes over you like a warm blanket. But I don’t dream anymore when I sleep and I miss that. I sleep light and wake up easy. If I get six hours of sleep a night it’s a good night.”

Financial situations of a single mom don’t allow for room to date. “The lawyer couldn’t handle that I had a kid. Kids, even one, cost a fortune. I don’t have anyone to count on to share the load. Even during the marriage, her father couldn’t hold a job. He jeopardized mine by becoming hooked on cocaine. We were in marriage counseling two years when I dropped the bomb on him during a session and told him I knew. I was a single income even when I was married and he was shooting it up. No one is going to get that close to my livelihood again. It could’ve ruined it all.”

“I’ve made no time for dating. It’s easier to be alone. I enjoy my nursing job more than I ever did dating. I am appreciated. I can help someone and care someone who deserves it.”

The law enforcement field has left TR feeling like many others. “I hate this job. I’d leave it in a heartbeat. I have to stay. I’ve got to raise the kid. And I want to go back to school to further my nursing and become a radiology technician. Maybe my mom was right.”

Asked if she had regrets, TR replied, “I’ve been accused of being overprotective. I don’t see it. I don’t carry a weapon off duty. I never have and won’t. No regrets. I am ready to go and am at peace. I am at ease with not coming home one night. I am at peace with God. If he wants me he’ll call me home- HE knows where to find me when he decides my work here is done. “

**K.R.** is37 years old and has 17 years with a sheriff’s department in the western suburbs of Chicago. She has worked in the jail, at the sheriff’s work alternative learning camp and now works court administration at the courthouse. She is looking forward to retirement at 20 years.

“I live alone. I have never been married and don’t I ever will be while I am in this job. I was raised by my grandmother and mother. My grandfather died when I was young and my dad wasn’t really there. I had no real father figure.” When asked about dating she replied, “I will start my life when I leave here. All I saw was how many men cheat and the adultery in this profession. I wouldn’t want a husband. This job is not made for marriage to last.” She went on to say,” No men. My life is in stand-by. I am too picky and would rather be alone than waste my time with someone who won’t be here.” I asked if she gets lonely or maybe if she would want to keep company with someone just to pass the time. I felt sadness in her voice to think that someone as gentle and decent as she has chosen ‘being alone’ intentionally. She laughed it off and said,” I don’t have to try every cookie to know which ones I like.” Humor to cover isolation is not an uncommon coping mechanism. She admitted she ‘used to be more creative and felt brain dead for lack of caring what came next.’ I asked her how important it is for her to be in law enforcement. I was surprised by her answer. “I don’t even like being a cop. I never really felt like it was ever any more than a paycheck and a job with cool uniforms.” I asked if she felt she brought value to the job or if it gave value to her self-esteem. Her answer came from the core of her professional experience. “You think you matter- you don’t- not at all. I am disgruntled. Yes I am. Supervisors will diminish your worth and your value at every turn.” When asked what she dreams of doing she answered, “I used to go out and meet people. I used to go back stage at concerts and do improve downtown. I am creatively dead.” She latched onto the word dream and said,” I enjoy my dreams. They are like movies. There is one where I am dead but waiting to be dismembered and I still know what is going on and will until the hand reaches and grabs my heart out of my chest.” The look on my face made her laugh. She said, “No, it’s cool. I don’t feel anything.” I asked her if she ever had random thoughts or intrusive snapshot segments in her thinking. This is a sign of the hyper-vigilance roller coaster known to torment law enforcement. She said, “Wow. I thought that was just me and I was a little nuts. Are other people feeling this too?” I told her that many officers experience this as our minds try to compensate for what we see in the course of our jobs. There was a shift in the thinking in the room. She now was asking me very pointed questions about what I had felt, known or experienced. We laughed about an incident in which we wrestled a 350# naked angry woman in the padded cell of the jail when we were both rookies. She said, “When someone finds out I’m a cop then they want to hear a ‘cop story’ and that’s the one I always tell. It is funny now but it sure wasn’t then. I was really scared and holding on for dear life till it was over. Weren’t you?” I admitted it’s the same story I tell to satisfy cop groupies. I admitted to having been just as afraid as she was. We laugh now but we cannot forget how bad that moment was. We buffer it in humor. KR admits she ‘zones out’ in front of the TV with no interest but time alone. “I got tired of others getting credit and financial bonuses for my ideas. I was tired of supervisors who are useless. I am tired of men who cheat at the first opportunity. I have lost my creativity. I have lost my desire to go out and meet people. I don’t even like being a cop and I can’t wait to retire and get out of here.” KR borrowed Dr.Kevin Gilmartin’s book from me (Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement). She admitted, “I was so drained, I hadn’t realized that stress was so pervasive in my life that I’d made room for it to govern how I live my life.” We agreed we would continue to talk and both be better for it. **Data Analysis**

Each of the five female law enforcement officers spoke with me for a minimum of ninety minutes in one or two interviews. One shared nearly three hours of relevant emotions and values over the time we spoke. As interviewer, I had the unique perspective of informant. I also found it almost too easy to identify with the pain and heartache. The data is presented as impartially as I possibly could but with no denial of knowing exactly the depth of the commitment they felt.

There were common themes throughout each of the five interviews. Most significant and ever present was the issue of personal relationships; the value on the ones that were solidly in place and the ones that feel victim to the hazards of the job. Not allowing oneself to feel emotionally dependent on a partner was clear even if fully involved in a long term arrangement. Limits were self-imposed as to how much each female would allow herself to feel; in what measure without reservation. Practical matters regarding finances and security bore out each of the hypotheses put forward in this paper. Chronic exhaustion was simply just part of daily living and was adapted as ‘just the way it is.’ Feeling like lead at the end of the day found each of them looking for a chair to sink into and a place to zone out. All participants chaffed under the micromanaging of supervisors that were out of touch with line officers. Situational depression was like an old pair of shoes you kick off at the end of the day. Each of the female officers spoke of keeping the job separate from their life outside of work. Stress was ever present in the lives of each of these women. The coping mechanisms were all tailored to their own special needs. How they accommodated stress was clever and unique unto each of them. This pilot study only had the input of five women in law enforcement. The outcome would have been the same for 50.

**Findings**

When asked about programs that the department provided to help them cope with stress most of the females in this study found it laughable. Employee Assistance Programs are not confidential enough to put these women at ease. "The counselors in those programs never understand what it means to be a cop or the stress that is faced- never mind how to function in the job itself. What they know they’ve read in books. There could be peer support available. In a large part, this study has proven to be exactly that for not just the participants but for the researcher as well.

Preventing stress by training officers to use stress reduction techniques plays out too much like a flavor-of-the-month management program. It is looked at with suspicion and the results can be used to document job inefficiencies later at time of personal performance reviews.

Some discussion of training during the recruit period was offered but rookies have no frame of reference. Stress comes with experience. What a rookie experiences is controlled by what he is exposed to and what he is allowed to see. An ‘inoculation’ period would serve little purpose and be forgotten by the time it is needed. Perhaps six to eight months into the job it would be more meaningful, when the rookie isn’t so much of a rookie any longer.

Women in law enforcement are a different animal. We look at things differently than the men see them. We experience stress differently and we accommodate it into our womanhood in a manner different from men.   **Conclusion**

Look at what is not fully known. Stress in law enforcement, specifically in female officers, it is an understudied area. When it is studied the most meaningfully, it is by prior or current law enforcement personnel. We need to get a new perspective on old data and find a new use for it. It must be a proactive engagement of the knowledge that is out there. There needs to be a re-conceptualizing of theory and practice. “Accepting the challenge to do things differently requires that one actively confront present products and procedures. To confront is to speak the truth face-to-face, to vigorously invite comparisons and to enter into open healthy conflict. The confronter does not claim to have the absolute truth, but challenges others in pursuit of such truth, based on personal perceptions and understanding. The choice of confrontation style is governed by a paradox and a principle. The paradox is that organizational development should simultaneously generate stress and build group support. The principle to be invoked in resolving the paradox is that people can learn only what they already know , a concept described by N. Agnew and J. Brown in an *Organizational Dynamics* article from 1982. Learning takes place in incremental steps” (Cunningham 1989)

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Biography

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Diane has recently completed her Master’s of Science in Organizational Behavior at Benedictine University, Lisle Illinois.

Diane has been a Sworn Sheriff’s Deputy in the western suburbs of Chicago for the past thirteen years. She specializes in Juvenile Delinquency / Neglect & Abuse She is also a U.S. Navy Vietnam Era Veteran.

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