

Cultivating wellbeing amongst police officers: Examining challenges in the workplace

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Introduction

This chapter presents qualitative data gathered through an interview process as part of a small-scale exploratory study within New South Police Force (NSWPF), Australia. The exploratory study aimed to support the cultivation of wellbeing amongst police officers through examining aspects of the policing environment and workplace. The study in which this chapter is based, used a non-probability sample made up of 14 police officers (see table 1 below), selected from two Local Area Commands (LAC), one command being in a city location, the other command being in a regional location. This approach to sampling was adopted in order to considered differences between police practice in city and regional locations.

Table 1: Sample by Gender and Service length

Sex	Service length
Male	11 - 20 yrs.
Male	11 - 20 yrs.
Male	11 - 20 yrs.
Male	11 - 20 yrs.
Male	21 - 30 yrs.
Male	21 - 30 yrs.
Female	0 -10 yrs.
Male	0 -10 yrs.
Male	0 -10 yrs.
Female	0 -10 yrs.
Female	11- 20 yrs.
Male	11- 20 yrs.
Male	21 - 30 yrs.
Female	0 - 10 yrs.

The data collected was analysed using a thematic analysis, resulting in a rich description of the dataset occurred. By using an inductive approach to analysing the data, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) themes are allowed to emerge from within the data and are not imposed from existing theoretical frameworks. The themes emerging from the dataset centred on three broad themes of: *Policing and Trust, Surveillance of Police*

Officers and Workplace Support Dualities. This chapter considers each of these themes before concluding with a series of recommendations to address the challenges police officers face within their workplace that can enhance and promote wellbeing.

Policing and Trust

The importance of trust in workplaces, including police organisations (Schafer, 2013), has been discussed at length by previous researchers (Ellwart et al, 2012; Innocenti et al, 2011; Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012; Spector & Jones, 2004; Thomas et al, 2009; Vickers, 2008). The New Public Management's (NPM) view of organizations has been described as a chain of low-trust, principal/agent relationships, rather than fiduciary or trustee-beneficiary ones (Perry et al, 2009) concurrent to NPM being lauded as a reform framework proposed to reverse declining trust in organizations (Yang & Holzer, 2006). While a lack of appreciation for affective responses to workplace events has been found to produce productivity and morale problems (Kiel & Watson, 2009), effective managers know that motivating people, keeping people, and creating productive work environments requires positive affect (Kiel & Watson, 2009) – including the presence of trust. The best police leaders have been noted to communicate effectively and promote trust within their work groups: Chief Burtell Jefferson of the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington DC, USA would be a relevant case in point (Williams & Kellough, 2006). Based on those interviewed, trust is not only desired by members of the NSWPF, but an occupational requirement as well. Trust was reportedly required in many domains and roles of police work: trust between officers doing operational aspects of their job; trust between operational officers and management; officers trusting that the organisation would support officers when they needed it; and, trust that the organisation's structures, policies and processes were appropriate and adequate to provide the support that officers felt they needed. The interview data revealed that if trust was absent, or doubted, problems would arise. Past research has noted that in all organizations, trust and mutual trust, are integral elements of high performance teams and require close attention by management to maintain (e.g. Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012; Thomas et al, 2009; Vickers, 2008). Trust has also been identified as being notable in that it is fragile and reciprocal in nature: building trust among team members can take a long time but, if betrayed, can take even longer to repair.

Needing to Trust

Officers spoke frequently and frankly about the need for trust:

But it's just a matter of knowing who you can trust. As I said, trust is a massive thing.

Officers spoke often of the need for trust but that sometimes it was not present, and needed to be:

When you feel as though you haven't got the support of those, that you can't trust them, to be quite honest, they stab you in the back. The cops talk; we're terrible gossipers. I hate gossip. Rumour, gossip and innuendo just doesn't wash with me. If someone hasn't got the balls to say it to your face, my honest opinion is they should just shut their mouth and move on. I've got no time for it, I don't like it. It's negative.

Trust between operational officers and management has been noted by past researchers as a strong constituent element in what is termed 'the psychological contract' (Dick, 2006; Noblett *et al.* 2009). The psychological contract is a term used to describe what management expect from its employees, and vice versa. While the contract itself can be dynamic and organic in nature, and is usually formed without a specific formula or model, it frequently has a very strong influence on determining behaviour within organizations by individuals. Researchers confirm that staff perceptions that the psychological contract had been breached would also be seen as a significant breach of trust.

Trust was a binding factor within many of the workplace relationships for those interviewed for this research. The reading of situations, scenarios and relationships (with other police, and with the community) were reported to be constituent elements that informed the psychological contract that officers believed they had entered into with each other, and with management, on a day-to-day basis. Officers spoke about their colleagues not just needing to be trustworthy individuals, but of being able to be trusted to do their job competently:

I think people have to earn your trust just as I have to earn other people's trust. I probably, especially at the upper levels of the police, I understand why some bosses used certain staff, because you trust them ... I'm not talking about, the inherent trust is the ethical one and all that sort of stuff. But the trust about, ideally, about whether they can get the job done needs to be built up with me. They have to show that they can actually do it and that sort of thing. I get disappointed if people let you down, especially if you communicated on X, Y, Z being done and it doesn't get done at once.

The data also revealed a need for trust that can manifest either consciously or unconsciously, and in numerous areas. This need for trust was in several areas: between police officers working together; between police officers and the senior hierarchy of the organisation; and, with the broader community. Given the inherent risk of police work, trust was seen to be essential to the role and process of police work so that officers might execute their professional responsibilities adequately, but also with a sense of security and confidence; feeling that the organisation and its management will be behind them if they faltered, or struck trouble:

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 and my partner. So, I've got to be able to trust you knowing full well that I've got the utmost confidence in my work colleagues; that they've got my back, I've got their back.

Researchers, such as Dick (2006) have confirmed that when trust is precarious, or absent, the entire psychological contract, whatever it might comprise, can be called into question. This, in turn, can be very detrimental to working individuals, especially their ability to function effectively and remained motivated. If officers felt their psychological contract with management had been breached or not fulfilled by the other party, the sense of betrayal accompanying this could undermine existing trust even further. This has been confirmed in the literature and can potentially harm the organisation in a number of ways, through: lowered morale; reduced motivation; and, increased leave-taking, absenteeism, and resignations. There was evidence of this in our data. For example, one officer reported that they had been bullied at work, but that

they did not trust the organisation or senior colleagues enough to share the difficulties this offices was experiencing on the job. This officer's reported view was that if they had reported the bullying to a senior colleague, that this would have made matters worse for them. At the time of interview, the bullying had, fortunately, ceased and this officer confirmed that they were very relieved they had told no-one:

Upon reflection, I'm glad I didn't go to a sergeant. I'm glad I didn't go to anybody in the police force and tell them what I was going through. Because of course, you've got that kind of trust or whatever. But ultimately, he's going to have to go to that [other officer] and say, "What's going on?" And they're going to talk and everything else comes from that and it happens again.

The importance of trust in a positive workplace culture, and in supporting officer wellbeing cannot be overstated. While requiring further evidence to confirm the substance of possible difficulties around trust between officers and within the organisation, it is the case that if officers could not trust the organisation, its processes, and its management to support them, this would be highly likely to have a negative impact on their wellbeing, performance, motivation, desire to return to work after stressful events, and their intention to remain with the organisation.

Staff Turnover

Staff turnover was also recognised as a clear problem by NSWPF management (NSWPF, 2013), but also by police officers interviewed. Evidence of their concern and some of the possible reasons for it emerged in some of the respondent stories. NSWPF research (NSWPF, 2013) has already confirmed that many officers are still leaving the organisation on stress-based medical discharge and that between 1 Jan 2009 and 18 May 2011, 66% of officers leaving the organisation had received a medical discharge. The peak age of discharge (post 1988, with claims) was 36-40 years (44%). The majority (82%) of medical discharges were between the ages of 31-45 years. The length of service (post 1988 discharge, with claims) was mostly around 16-20 years. However, 26% of medical discharges were in service for between 11-15 years. 24% were between 6-10 years. Of the post 1988 discharges, with claims, group, 79% were discharged with only psychological injuries. 14% had both physical and psychological injuries. Very disturbing is that 93% of all medical discharges from NSWPF had a psychological

component (NSWPF, 2013). Understandably, the problem of staff turnover is of concern and clearly having an adverse effect on wellbeing.

Participants also spoke about there being a certain ‘type’ of person who can succeed in policing. This so-called “ideal officer” varied between participants’ reports, but included commonalities in relation to attitude, ability to deal with pressure and, importantly, what the ideal officer’s beliefs might be about the job and what it should entail:

You've got to love cops and robbers. You've got to love chasing criminals ... There seem to be people who join this job and it's almost for a social life or something, some of the younger people. I don't begrudge them that but it'd be nice if they also had a passion for actually arresting people, the right people, that is.

There are a couple of cases here at the moment and I understand why they want to stay in this job: because of the pay. But they should not be here; they should never have joined this job. They're stressful people. They worry about everything and this isn't the job where you can worry about things. If you worry about minor things, don't join this job.

You've just got to be hard working. I mean 90 per cent of all jobs are just the same. You've just got to have a go really. You've just got to be a hard worker. If you get out there and have a go, you're going to build up your skills. The icing on the cake would be if they love to arrest criminals and if they treat people well on top of that. I mean I don't know what else you've got to do.

Only a certain type of person, I think, could do it... It just makes me want to prove that I'm strong enough. If you don't want to be here, this can be hell on earth. I think some people who don't want to be here, and possibly never wanted to be here, but struggled to get out, would be very unhappy in their job.

High staff turnover has been noted as being very harmful to many organisations, but also in police organisations (e.g. see Johnson, 2012). One study compared the impact of voluntary and involuntary turnover on organisational performance among police

departments, and found that voluntary turnover had a more negative impact. It was also suggested in that study that managers needed to address the concerns of strong performers in police organisations in order to reduce their dissatisfaction and reduced their incentive to leave. In addition to this, while it would normally be expected that the turnover of poor police performers might be beneficial to the organisation, this same study claimed that the departure of poor performers could also become detrimental to organisational performance if their vacancies were not filled quickly.

Officers interviewed in this study were also reportedly concerned about how the high levels of staff turnover and how this might have been negatively impacting the NSWPF organisation, and their ability to do their jobs:

We do a very bad job of replacing staff after they've transferred out ... Because someone will transfer out, and we don't advertise their position until after they've transferred out. Which means that there has been no real induction or handover from the person going out, to the person coming in.... Regardless of whether the person on their way out is a great operator or a raving lunatic, regardless of that, they've still got all that local knowledge and history that they've built up over two, three, four or five years, whatever it might be. And that just disappears overnight. It's gone on the back of a removals truck. Then you get someone else who comes in and will be keen, and then they've got to start all over again.

If management were believed to have not offered support to staff who needed it, or were seen to have deliberately undermined staff, this was considered by interviewees to be a likely cause of turnover and absenteeism. The outcome for remaining officers was also reported: that they then needed to be reliant on less experienced, less effective, less knowledgeable replacements when compared to those who had left the organisation:

[on the previous Commander] Dysfunctional. He didn't have balls. He made it so much worse, giving into all the underlings and no senior management support whatsoever. It was piss-poor management, it really was. Well, we had inspectors going off on stress leave and refusing to work with him and it was

not good. Then I'd lose them and I'd have no support because the ones that replaced them, like the sergeants that acted up, were piss-poor.

Respondents in this research believed that way officers were managed could have been responsible, at least in part, for the high staff turnover. This would be something the NSWPF could look towards improving in the future, especially if such a concern is confirmed during later research:

They talk to some of the constables like they're kids That's why half the people leave the police I think. It's because they're sick of being treated like a kid, because it's just embarrassing.

This research also exposed participant perceptions that it was very difficult to advance within the NSWPF. There was a perception that getting promoted was very onerous and, worse, that it was perceived to be unpredictable and exclusive. If it is widely reported during interviews that internal promotions were very difficult – next to impossible even – to achieve. Such beliefs, whether true or not, can also negatively impact staff motivation, and intention to remain with the organisation:

When I was going through the promotions process that was probably the biggest anxiety that I had.

The promotion system, instead of police, this is way out there. Police should be paid on seniority and not on what rank they obtain. Because now we just have people who, all they want to do is sit around and study for the next exam or boost their CV or make connections on how to get promoted... That all changed when they brought in merit-based promotion. I used to just see guys just sitting around studying. While I was doing police work, I'd just watch guys sit around and study so they could pass the test so they can get promoted. I don't see how that's of benefit.

It's not as bad anymore but there's still that degree that people are more interested in getting promoted more than helping the public. That's organisation-

wide. I'm sure every station's exactly the same. Their concerns are to get promoted and it's got nothing to do with helping someone on the street.

Police officers at all levels of NSWPF showed evidence of concern with the problem of staff turnover from the organisation. Some of the early messages presented here suggest that attention to some management practices may offer one means to address the problem of staff leaving the organisation prematurely.

Surveillance of Police Officers

The issue of surveillance was the second theme to emerge from the dataset of this exploratory study. Police officers reported that they were routinely observed, even scrutinised and judged, as part of their daily routine when doing their job. This was perceived by them to be a particular challenge; police officers interviewed frequently spoke of how they were challenged both personally and professionally by surveillance processes and individuals, from numerous quarters, pervaded their lives and the conduct of their job. The sources of surveillance they spoke of were also expanding and changing, and existed simultaneously with ongoing changes taking place within NSWPF as an organisation. The sources of surveillance specifically commented on by officers in this study are explored below, however, one of the main issues that was reported on in this study was how surveillance takes place, how it was constructed, and what its impact is on police officers as individuals, and as a collective.

Other Police Officers and surveillance

While surveillance of police officers has been shown to inhibit their discretionary behaviour (such as inviting leniency when dealing with offenders), the increased potential for litigation facing police was also reported to have risen dramatically over the last three decades. From this increasingly litigious context has grown a term called 'litigaphobia', which describes a deep-seated anxiety around the legal action that threatens a person who is executing their role.

As police officers are able to make complaints through the same legislation as the public, one aspect of concern raised during interviews was the potential conflict that could arise for an officer, especially with regard to their role in complaints that have

been made. They could either be involved as a complainant, or as an officer defending a claim.

Officers involved in this research consistently reported the pressure and effects of the 'complaint system' that surrounded this police legislation, suggesting that this could impact on them daily. Research suggests that almost 30% of complaint reports made against police officers are made by fellow officers, with the remainder of complaints being made by the public (NSW Ombudsman, 2014). The impact of this system is not only enforced by statute in law, but by other factors discussed by interviewees.

For example, the question of integrity of the process and the officers making complaints about other officers arose. Interviewees shared their perceptions of the complaint system and spoke about their experiences with it. While agreeing that individual officers should have the right to complain about other officers if the genuine need arose, officers interviewed also felt that the evidence used to support such complaints needed to be verified in some way to ensure its validity at the outset, to ensure the avoidance of purely vexatious complaints going forward that could potentially damage the reputation of an officer, and yet still be without reasonable cause:

Now 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 I was taking on one particular person who was breaching his conditions all the time. He started making allegations against me, you know, taking bribes and stuff like that, which is just totally untrue. But the police department, wanting to be open and honest and transparent, did an investigation, one to showed him that, "No, this hadn't occurred." ... Because unless they offer some actual evidence and something reasonable and decent about the complainant, we shouldn't even have to touch it.

When speaking of having the right to complain via the Police Service Act, officers also spoke of the fact that, once a complaint had been made, those handling the complaints (also from within the police) needed to follow protocols to ensure the protection of the NSWPF as an organisation. The stated concern by interviewees lay, not with the need to protect NSWPF, but that in doing so, there could arise a conflict of interest where

the interests of the officers, either as complainants, or those being complained about, were not necessarily remaining highlighted against the backdrop of NSWPF needing to protect itself. Here, again, the question of officers needing to trust in the organisation to support police officers doing their work arose through discussion of the administrative processes used to respond to this constant community and police scrutiny:

The person who's doing the investigation has no rights; he can't say anything at all. He can't talk to anyone about it, he can't defend himself and he can't defend anyone else. I've been caught in this situation many a time, 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. That is really damaging for the police because all they're hearing is gossip, rumour and innuendo that's being spread in the meal room and they're not hearing the full side of it.

Ombudsman

The NSW Ombudsman is viewed as a further set of eyes gazing on police along with other police, the general public, and the media. While the Ombudsman may not have powers to prosecute and may exercise discretion in regards to what is recommended for further review or enquiry, the Ombudsman is still considered an 'external agency' by police officers and one that represents the community, rather than only serving as an investigating, independent body.

I've had to do quite a few recently where it's just, unfortunately, these ones were encouraged by the Ombudsman. To put it bluntly, they were crap, absolute crap. There were police officers doing their job and it was legitimate and they were doing it. But they were just listening to the community who were having a whinge.

The Ombudsman, again rather than being an independent investigator and having a legal representative force of its own, was viewed as another 'organisation' with extraneous powers to directly determine or direct police activity, rather than investigate and recommend actions to remediate. While the Ombudsman's function in reality may

be to handle complaints, it was the process of investigation that was the cause of much disruption to the lives of officers interviewed:

I'd love to change the complaint management system in the cops. I'd love to be able to just get rid of all the bullshit that we're faced with and, honestly, the encouragement of complaints from other organisations outside the cops, such as the Ombudsman. If we could get that so they can really feel the confidence that they can go out and do it and not be scrutinised for everything they do. That would help them a lot ... All you hear them say is, "It's fucked. It's absolute bullshit. And why are we having to answer these questions? Especially when we're dealing with complaints where there's no substance behind it." There's no quality behind it but somebody's decided to make a complaint, so we've got to go through the process.

The Ombudsman investigations could be framed as an additional external organisational stressor for police officers, one that may be necessary, but that was perceived as being potentially adversarial and prosecutory in its purpose. The Ombudsman's Office was considered by some in the interviews to be open to potential exploitation by those in the general public (or within the service) who's claim could be vexatious and without basis.

Probably one of our biggest frustrations is external agencies, especially government-orientated.

I know we can triage complaints, we can get rid of them. But even the triage process still takes a bit of effort. For me to triage a complaint and get rid of it, it could take me two hours. That's two hours of my time that could much be better spent, rather than sitting there dealing with someone's need to be, or have a whinge or a gripe at the police force. People are going to be unhappy when we deal with them because we deal with people that are at their lowest of their lives...

The potential fall-out from public complaints and the perceptions of an unbridled process raised the question of whether the NSWPF was also at the mercy of other external agencies such as insurance companies during such processes. This served to compound a sense of police feeling like machines that were sometimes "damaged", but could be fixed up easily, and cheaply:

I really don't want to see us go down the path of having our organisation when it comes to staff who are suffering or who are off duty, on return to work plans or whatever, I don't want to see it get to the point where the decisions are being made and reigns are being pulled by insurance companies. Because we're not motorcars. We're not trying to get out of fixing up something that's been damaged in a motor vehicle accident for the cheapest quote.

General Public

Further concerns with surveillance and complaints were also discussed, especially about the NSWPF's handling of both internal and externally initiated complaints concurrently. One officer spoke at length about the 'Police Services Act' (2003), a legislative imperative that places responsibility for processing and resolving complaints, both internal and external, with NSWPF itself – a situation some would describe as 'police policing the police'. As noted above, internal complaints are certainly an issue of concern for many officers in NSWPF but so are complaints from the public. Both were reported to take a lot of resources to respond to. The NSWPF's response, and how it was handled, was also seen to be a potential area for undermining trust in the organisation:

We probably get one out of every 20 or 30 complaints gets substantiated, and the other 29 are crap. There's no value in it and there's nothing there to justify why it was made in the first place.

The general public, as an external stakeholder to the NSWPF, was also described as another source of surveillance by several officers interviewed. Public perceptions of police offices, and how they conducted themselves as individuals and as an organization, were part of the reported experience of "feeling watched". There was also a strong perception by interviewees that police officers, how that person conducts themselves, and the job they are required to do, were always in the public eye:

It's hard not to switch off, especially when you sign up for a job where you're never not a police officer. On a day off you're still expected to step in sometimes ... So you can't really turn off. The pressures through judicial system and public expectations.

But even with this scrutiny, there remained a strong sense from those interviewed that police as individuals, and as an organisation, worked for the community. It was believed to be important that the community felt confidence in the police:

I think to a degree ... people pretty much think of you as their own personal resource. They want to be able to know that they can stop you in the street. They want to be able to talk to you while you're standing at the bar having a beer on a Friday night at the meat raffles or wherever it is. They want to know that you won't bullshit to them; because they can just see through that. So having a complete, both feet, jump straight in, is what they want.

While the constant scrutiny and surveillance from the general public was viewed with concern, police officers interviewed also suggested that frequently they enjoyed, and were proud of, being noticed by members of the public. Certainly, though, the constant scrutiny, if not well managed, could also become a source of significant stress for officers, especially in regional areas where they were “closer” and better known personally to the members of the communities they served.

The impact of constant surveillance cannot be underestimated; police reported feeling “watched”, and losing confidence, knowing they were constantly on show. They were afraid a mistake would be harshly judged by the general public, and others who had a role over surveillance of the police. They also feared that such mistakes could have negative consequences for them, as individuals, and for the organisation. Officers need to believe NSWPF will support them, even when making mistakes that might reflect badly on NSWPF for a short period, so they can trust the organisation, and themselves to carry out their duties with confidence.

Workplace Support Dualities

Dualisms and dualities in the workplace happen where there is a coexistence of two opposing states or parts, which may be physical and organizational (e.g. NSWPF offering psychological support for officers to support their wellbeing, but processes within that same organisation leaving officers feeling vulnerable, traumatised or humiliated), or personal and individual. Several such organisational dualities were exposed during interviews, especially around police officers experienced anxiety and

confusion when doing their jobs. Such confusion, tension, and anxiety often resulted, as noted above, from the wide array of both operational and organisational stressors, as well as dichotomies that were believed to exist between job expectations and realities. These also combined with perceptions of ongoing scrutiny and surveillance from so many sources, internal and external, to the organisation. Officers spoke, possibly as a result of all this, about their constant comparisons between what 'is' and what 'ought to be' when doing their work.

Accessing and Perceptions of Support

It was apparent that NSWPF is concerned with offering support to officers at all levels in the organisation who are undertaking police work. There was little argument against notions that police needed support: physically, psychologically, emotionally, managerially, and structurally from the NSWPF organisation. Evidence of needing and wanting this has been reconfirmed in the stories above. NSWPF have also done considerable work in reviewing the status of these support needs within the organisation and it is noted that many initiatives have been undertaken, and remain in place that have been intended to remedy this critical officer and organisational concern. The NSWPF Review of Injury Management Practices (2011), for instance, emphasises the need of the organisation to focus on the abilities and strengths of returning officers to work, as well as underscoring the need to step away from a previously adversarial system which has served to undermine trust and open communication in the workplace. It would appear that most of those interviewed for this report would agree with this desired objective.

Officers interviewed all had a general sense of the systems in place within the organisation to support their wellbeing. Depending on the issue for the individual officer, they spoke of being aware of various options being available to support their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. However, it did not appear that there was always a full and thorough understanding of what was available, nor was it clear that officers believed that such support procedures and policies were fully supported by management. Support that was reportedly used was often considered by officers to be something much broader, and less formal, than the many of the current formal programs and services that were to be found within the organization. Support was regarded as

something that ideally should be given, offered or shared between people, and in a myriad of situations in the workplace.

Officers were reportedly grateful that NSWPF had recognised the need for such support and developed a strong recognition of mental health injury. However, they believed a gap still remained in terms of the ability of officers to access the formal support programs that had been made available by the organisation to assist. Interviews revealed that, while officers still often preferred to talk to peers or mentors informally, they also recognised that there was a strong need for a personal and professional rapport and trust to exist, in order for such informal processes to be workable. There was also recognition that there needed to be more than just the informal sharing mechanisms, because suicides still happened, now and in the past. One officer spoke of how well the informal processes could work, but noted their inadequacy, nevertheless:

The only support was the old, 'sit around on a Thursday night cut-out' Back then, we're talking a long time ago, pre-Royal Commission, you'd have a couple of beers at work on the Thursday night in the meal room and have a chin-wag. That, still to this day, I still believe is one of the best support mechanisms you have, because although we didn't have the [EAP] and all that sort of stuff, we had each other. People would talk to each other. But on the same token, we also had a lot of police back then commit suicide. Because they didn't feel that they could talk openly and honestly.

We've become a lot better now in identifying that people need to have support for these things. Everyone's different too. Like some people enjoy the EAP; enjoy counsellors. I never have. I've enjoyed talking to people that I trust and dealing with it that way.

It would appear that the stigma felt by those interviewed around acknowledging stress remains strong in NSWPF and is working against the organisation's best efforts to provide emotional, physical and psychological support to officers. And while stress triggers might be different for sworn officers, reported responses to stress by sworn and unsworn interviewees was fairly consistent, and included an acknowledgement that organisational support was required for stress and strain:

I suppose doing child protection was the trigger. It was the thing that finally wore me down and had the breaking point. There I was working long hours doing plenty of miles, pretty much working on my own without support and carrying a lot, everyone else's emotional baggage. Which meant that I was full ...when you're stuck in it, in that dark place, yeah it's difficult.

Unfortunately, and despite a clear need, it became clear that Employment Assistance Program (EAP) and other NSWPF support services were still rarely accessed as a result of the perceived stigma surrounding doing that.

I was diagnosed with the dreaded PTSD back in 2003. So, that's a roller coaster ride where you not only ride it on your own but the collateral damage of your family that ride along with you ... I was offered an opportunity to come back when I came back to work, in my return to work plan, after three months, transferring into the command ... Which was a positive for me, because as far as I was concerned, I was adamant that my time was done. I thought I was pretty well unemployable and this is back in 2003. So, we're 10 years down the track now. That was a stepping stone to get back into the workplace.

Return to work after injury and organisational support for this was greatly valued by this officer. It was felt that there was additional pressure of having a PTSD diagnosis. While expressing extreme gratitude for a safe return to work, which enabled officers to continue their work and career into the future, extreme anxiety was reported around the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD, presenting a two-pronged choice for those who suffered this particular mental health injury. First, they reported needing to decide if they should risk reporting it to the organisation, and taking the risk (that they perceived to be the high) that a corollary of shame would follow. Second, officers also spoke about what they perceived as danger for them in returning to a place of work that they felt would not necessarily support them adequately, and preserve their dignity, upon their return.

Support was also discussed in relation to informal mentoring and support programs needing to directly include involvement from management. Respondents felt that

support in the job of policing did not necessarily need to come from formalized programs, or extensive training, but rather from senior staff and peers sharing real life experiences that may mirror those currently experienced by injured officers. This would serve to assist injured officers in feeling that they were not alone in their experiences, and trauma, and not feel that they were “less of a police officer” because of having experienced and acknowledged some very traumatic events, and their responses to it.

Experienced officers who had shared their traumatic experiences were seen as very helpful to those less experienced, and enabled a less stigmatising avenue of support for those in need. Many officers recognised that they had difficulty discussing their emotional pain, or accessing formal support services to do so. They also reported not knowing how to openly express their inner turmoil and seek help, and of not wanting to because it might impact their work life negatively in the future. Those discussing the value of such informal support, perceived comradeship and open dialogue within the workplace felt that this was an ideal platform to enable them to seek the support that they recognised was needed to cope.

So, I know early on when I was probably 20, I saw an incident ... where basically this guy had run from an RBT site. He'd rolled the car on [a main] Road. I turned up and he was still hanging in the car upside down. I went, “No worries.” Next thing I looked down and his brain was right beside my foot. I went, “Oh, that's a bit ordinary.” But what was more gross, was across on the arm-guard railing on the other side, his face had actually been cut off. Peeled off like a mask, sitting on the ground. It was looking up at you.

The description from the officer above is a vivid recollection of what was, clearly, a very traumatic experience. But also evident in his description were euphemisms used to describe appalling events, possibly used to cover, or at least understate, how he was really feeling. Finding a person’s brain next to his foot was described as “ordinary”; that same person’s face peeled off like a mask on the ground was described merely as “gross”. Here was an example of a traumatic episode being shared, and remembered in excruciating detail, from years earlier. And no help had been sought by this officer at all to deal with any of it. He had spoken of his ordeal with no one; just carried it

around in his head, until a senior colleague shared a similar experience and the officer finally felt able to share his trauma, without feeling stigmatised by the sharing of it:

That took me, I reckon, six months to deal with because I couldn't, being young and inexperienced, I couldn't talk about it. I couldn't explain it and I was having numerous sleepless nights. It wasn't until we were actually sitting around the meal room one night at work We were having a chin-wag and one of the senior constables was just talking about different things. He talked about something he saw and how it affected him and gave him sleepless nights. I went, "That's affected you?" He went "Yeah, yeah." I went, "Oh." Then I told my story and once I realised that it was normal for us to experience that, it really helped me. I wasn't different to anyone else.

This kind of support from senior officers was considered paramount to successfully managing stress in policing. It was believed that, regardless of an individual's levels of resilience, without this kind of support from senior officers, and colleagues, it would be very challenging, even impossible, for any of them to cope:

To do this job for a lengthy period of time you need to have resilience. You've got to have resilience... I am pretty resilient too, whatever. But what I did learn is I cannot do my job and operate at this level without the supporting commander.

If there was a perception of an absence of what officers thought was *accessible* support within the NSWPF, some officers (mostly) new recruits indicated that they would seek support outside the organisation. But not all said they would do this. It is recognised that if there was a supportive network for them to access, such as family and friends, that could be invaluable. However, efficacious external support networks cannot be relied upon to always be available for new recruits (or more experienced officers) to access, and if they aren't, the wellbeing and potential longevity of that those officers could be jeopardised. And it remains the case that some officers choose not to speak to anyone about the events in their working day.

More experienced officers discussed the informal support processes that had existed within the workplace and how, over time this had changed because of the introduction of more formal support policies and processes. It was felt that, while more formal systems should remain in place, that they may not be accessible to all equally because of personal or situational circumstances that may have prevented access. Evidence presented above confirmed that access of such formal services was perceived as stigmatising by many, deterring their access to them. Officers sometimes made it clear that, in this more contemporary setting, that the opportunity or likelihood for a dialogue to exist to offer peer support that they would have enjoyed was not present.

One officer spoke of having been moved away from support networks having been transferred to a different location; this is a factor that might need to be carefully considered in future when transferring officers to different LACs:

To begin with, you try to stay in contact. But then it gets a bit hard because you're hearing about people's lives Because I'm the only one in my class that got [to a different location] and a lot of my friends were stationed, it not together, within a 20 k radius. So you kind of feel like everyone's getting on with their life and you're kind of stuck, to an extent.

Regarding use of formal return-to-work support mechanisms and their ability to support returning officers, some espoused the multiple benefits of positive involvement from management in offering support to their colleagues. This, from a senior officer who felt they had contributed to the wellbeing of a junior officer in need of support:

I went and spoke to this young officer. She's a good kid but I could see that she was jaded. She just was virtually dragging her feet into the door. I asked her if she was interested. The six-week rotations turned into almost three months. She finishes up later on this month. She's taken on board two high-risk juvenile offenders to intensely case manage them. In the time that she's been doing that, so probably for the last six to eight weeks, neither of these kids have been locked up. Neither of them has been identified for committing a crime. I'm, just thinking, "You know, how easy is it?" She's loving it. Talking to her only this morning on the phone, she's totally reinvigorated. She's coming back to work,

back to her substantive role in uniform which she's part of a proactive team which concentrates on addressing crime and locking up crooks. You can just; you can see the change in her face and hear the change in her voice.

Support that was visibly offered and received, by and between all ranks for the NSWPF was thought to be very valuable. Support was also felt to be valuable just by the presence of very senior officers; it was considered valuable that very senior staff would make the time and effort to be among staff at all levels, and in all locations, in the NSWPF:

I do like our leadership at the top at the moment. I think Mr Scippione¹ to me is showing really strong character as a Commissioner for Police for Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong, North Coast and South Coast. But he needs to spread his view and needs to encompass the fact that he is the Commissioner for the whole state. I haven't seen the man, in five years, come out to the Western Region.

Communication in Distress

Officers discussed their perceptions of support and levels of communication within the organisation, specifically as these were perceived under stressful circumstances. Most officers understood, acknowledged and respected the need for the chain of command and rank. However, there were also reported frustrations with the operation of some lines of communication, particularly if there had been an expectation of support from management around a traumatic event, and it had not been received. Indeed, some officers described a lack of support when they had expected support to be forthcoming; many went further, describing their experience of being criticised and attacked, rather than receiving collegial or managerial support when they needed it:

I know this has been dragging on. In actual fact, we'd got emails recently from management at this facility here telling us that this matter's been dragging on and on and on, for way too long, and "What the fuck is going on with this?" "It's got nothing to do with us. What the fuck are you talking to us for?" It really upset us. It really did. We were fucking ropable and if it wasn't for the fact that

¹ Former NSW Police Commission, August 2007 to March 2017.

he is an Inspector of Police I would have been up there and I would have punched his lights out because of the way he spoke to us in this email. It was disgraceful.

Some respondents indicated they wanted to do what the NSWPF Review of Injury and Management Practices (2011) report recommended, but felt they had not been furnished with sufficient information to do what was expected of them as managers and, that when information regarding mental health support initiatives came to them from NSWPF, it had been passed to them through unexpected channels. It was suggested that when this happened, their positions were undermined, as was the organisation's, and confusion emerged regarding lines of authority:

I would question why we were doing this. And, "Where does this tie in to what we were already doing?". He didn't directly reply ... "Can you consult with me so we can -- ?" You know, "We'll drive this but, like, how about a bit of consultation?" I didn't get a reply. No reply. There was another example of a similar thing where they ... questioned but in courteous way. It was never, no. They just got no reply ... We have a chain of command in the police force, of course. And he could email and/or talk to anyone he wants to. He's a Commander. But at the moment he goes around his Inspectors and his senior management team straight to the sergeants for something that should be done in consultation with the Inspectors, and the management team to then drive. You then get the, "Well, who's running the show?" Or, "Who do I report to?" Or, "What's going on here?" from your subordinates.

You've got my subordinates going, "What the hell's going on? Why are we doing this?" Or, "Did you know about this?" And I'll say, "I don't know. I've got no idea. I'm going to work it out."

Other managers have reported having to withhold information from others and have done so deliberately to try and get their staff to focus on what can be done, rather than what cannot. Some officers reported their belief that they were under no obligation to explain further to those reporting to them what was going on. However, the response

from staff reporting to them who were left with insufficient information (in their view), was to become disengaged, demotivated, and feel belittled:

*I think a lot of people get upset and disgruntled or that sort of thing with management if you don't communicate things. Because you're not telling them; you don't have to tell them what you're doing. You just [tell somebody] when you **can** do something.*

Another issue is that those believing they were not receiving sufficient information felt ill-prepared to do their jobs. Some officers expressed confusion when they didn't understand the lack of information they were receiving, feeling that they had been left to read situations themselves to try and understand them, rather than having a person they could defer to for support, and that they could seek reassurance from, and possibly, with guidance, initiate a resolution if need be.

Longer serving officers in particular, spoke at length about inter-personal conflict being an issue. For some, their response was simply to stop communicating about something, or to that person, altogether – not really an ideal outcome from the organisation's point of view:

But as I said to him at the end, "Regardless of what happens, at the end of this conversation, when I get up and open that door we will never ever fucking discuss this again. Because I'm over it. You think you're over it? I'm over it." ... I'm a bit of a venter, I admit to that. But I like to vent and when I do, then I'll move on.

Other managers' spoke of their intolerance of workplace gossip and rumour, suggesting that not only did they not encourage it, they were also fearful of its effects on staff. However, they remained concerned with the ongoing need for transparency in communication.

Chinese whispers won't come into play, variances won't come into play. It's just got to be very clear and very transparent.

Unfortunately, for officers who were the subject of rumours, their reported response was often to withdraw from the organisation, as a mode of self-protection. However, the unfortunate and serendipitous consequence of this was that they were then without the support of colleagues, formally or informally, at a time when they needed it most:

I've had rumours spread about me recently but at the end of the day ... they're rumours. I really don't care. But apart from that I don't really socialise with police officers outside of work therefore I wouldn't say that I know everything that goes on.

Discussion and Conclusion

The chapter has presented empirical findings in order to consider the challenges faced by police officers in their workplace, challenges that can have an adverse effect on an individual's wellbeing. Through the exploration of three key themes: *Policing and Trust, Surveillance of Police Officers and Workplace Support Dualities* a number of issues have been raised that negatively impact on police officers as individuals, as a group and as an organisation. Whilst the dataset presented in this chapter is from a small scale study, it is not without its merits in terms of making recommendations and having implications for further study that can facilitate the cultivating of wellbeing amongst police officers. It is both important and necessary in the first instance to outline the key findings presented in this chapter and how they adversely effects wellbeing.

The dataset, first, reported on the need for trust in doing police work, with trust being of significance and frequently needing to be very high, and in numerous directions and between numerous stakeholders. Police officers reported needing, and desiring, high levels of trust: between officers and senior managers; between colleagues at similar levels working in teams; between police officers and the public they served; and between police officers at all levels and the organisation itself. Trust was identified as crucially being needed and, when it was absent, as contributing to a host of problems for individuals, and throughout the operation of the organisation. The dataset then reported on surveillance and how the police officers who were interviewed felt this impacted on their work. The type and level of surveillance, by many stakeholders within and outside the organisation, placed great pressure on those interviewed when

doing their duties as such they felt they were always being ‘watched’ and ‘judged’. The police officers interviewed also felt that, given this high level of surveillance, from many quarters, that making a mistake that could result in a trouble, for themselves, and for the organisation, was highly likely and of concern. This surveillance was reported by those interviewed as coming from other police officer, the NSWPF organisation, the community and the NSW Ombudsman. There are possibly other sources of surveillance not reported on in this chapter that may further contribute to officer concerns e.g. the role of the media. Questions of trusting the organisation to support them given their perception of exposure and vulnerability also arose in connection with these high levels of surveillance. Finally, the dataset revealed problems with workplace support, with officers noting that while NSWPF had put in place numerous measures intended to support officers with psychological injury, and to assist officers’ return to work after extended medical or stress leave, that many of these procedures and processes were having unintended, negative effects and outcomes for all involved (managers administering them, and officers accessing them). It was frequently reported that officers knew of the various support avenues available to them by NSWPF, especially those pertinent to psychological injury and recovery, but avoided using them, deliberately. Reasons cited for this seemed to point to the organisational culture of NSWPF, including the unhelpful operationalization of some of its formal and informal procedures, as well as officers reporting being shamed and humiliated if they showed weakness, and/or accessed any of the formal services available to help them. Reports of feeling shamed and humiliated were also found to have exacerbated and extended any experiences of individual trauma through dealing with the internal procedures (or their aftermath) that were intended to assist. Significantly, concerns were raised by officers who felt that any involvement with these processes could also have a deleterious impact on their continuing career, and future trajectory in the organisation. These unintended outcomes may well go towards explaining why, when officers go on any kind of stress- or psychological injury-related leave, they rarely returned to active (or any other) duties with NSWPF but exited the organisation permanently, taking their skills and experience with them.

The exodus of junior staff from NSWPF, as well as the high numbers of staff on medical, disability or stress leave at any given time (including those leaving the organisation after extended medical or stress leave, or who may have left due to

misaligned expectations as to what the job entailed), especially the more experienced officers, was also regarded as a significant loss by officers throughout the organisation, at all levels, not just management. The loss of skills and experience at all levels was considered to be a problem by many of the officers interviewed, one that was placing considerable burden on those who remained in the NSWPF having to continue their work and deal with serious operational issues, as required by the job, but with insufficient staff, or inexperienced staff to support them. While the NSWPF management knows of the loss of staff, and the high numbers on disability and stress leave, what NSWPF management may not be aware of is how seriously officers at all levels of the organisation view the situation. They may also not have realised how much staff speak of avoiding the support processes that are currently being made available to support them.

Officers interviewed found it extremely beneficial to be able to share their experiences, especially those traumatic ones they had encountered, with a supportive, trusted colleague. Several officers spoke directly of problems that pointed to them having a psychological injury that was very helpfully responded to through such conversations with peers and mentor figures that they trusted in the organisation. While it is not being suggested that the formal processes currently in place to support officers be reduced, perhaps some kind of informal or formal mentoring or discussion program be commenced that would facilitate opportunities for sharing, between peers and colleagues. This could be especially helpful between very experienced, longer-tenured officers and less experienced ones, and in a trusting and confidential environment, to supplement the current role of formal counselling and other EAP services now offered by the organisation. Some officers simply did not wish to access formal counselling services and a more informal approach being encouraged and made available internally, perhaps in an informal setting outside the walls of NSWPF LACs, would assist.

The findings presented in this chapter point towards areas that NSWPF and other policing organisations facing similar issues, can reasonably respond to, both in the short and longer term. This can be facilitated by the following initial recommendations. First, police organisations such as NSWPF consider doing a cultural audit of the organisation, on a regular basis (perhaps annually, or every second year) to measure and identify areas of concern within the culture and climate of the workplace. This would enable the

organisation to respond to problematic organisational cultural characteristics, including what seems to be emerging as a key issue in this study, for example, officers needing formalised support for their psychological injuries, choosing not to access those currently on offer by NSWPF due to fear of being shamed, humiliated, otherwise stigmatised, and their future careers being negatively affected as a result.

A review of police management communication and other managerial styles and processes should be carefully considered by police organisations such as NSWPF. Research involving observational work, including “shadowing” senior officers, is recommended as it might assist in pinpointing problem areas, people, LACs and disrespectful behaviour. It might also enable the highlighting and recording of what excellent senior managers are doing that is different when compared to those who are less well respected by staff.

Police research is also needed targeting possible and prospective new recruits, as well as school children and their parents, to learn how a police organisation like NSWPF is currently perceived and, especially, what community members and aspiring recruits believe police work entails. If there is a major mismatch between community expectations and the reality of modern police work, perhaps some advertising or other informational work might be carried out to remedy these misaligned expectations. This would also enable a re-alignment of the expectations of new recruits entering the organisation so they could have a more realistic appraisal of what police operational work, and working in a police organisation like NSWPF might entail. This reported mismatch of expectations arose in a number of interviews and seemed to point to a major reason why shorter tenure officers might be leaving the organisation prematurely.

The existence of negative workplace behaviours, by officers at all levels in police organisations as reported on in the study presented in this chapter needs to be responded to by the respective police organisation. Seminars and training intended to inform officers, not just of what negative behaviours are, and what they may look like, but the significant and deleterious outcomes that manifest from them if they are left to continue in a workplace unchecked. Bullying, for instance, is a widely misunderstood term, with serious consequences for all those caught up in it, with few understanding its serious nature, nor the misconceptions and flawed assumptions that exist pertaining to it.

Evidence of the existence of continuing negative workplace behaviours, as presented in this chapter, would suggest that there remains potential for psychological injury to still happen to officers within an organisation such as NSWPF as they go about their working day. Seminars addressing the nature of bullying, harassment, and incivility are recommended to inform officers of the nature of these behaviours, and to dispel the many myths surrounding them.

Finally, senior officers in an organisation such as NSWPF should be encouraged to find ways and means to speak informally with other officers, at all ranks, to share their past traumatic experiences, in ways that show other officers their experiences with them, and their understanding. These could be via small internal organisational talks, seminars, facilitated focus group meetings, or one-on-one meetings with junior officers present. In such sessions, officers at all levels (and especially new recruits and junior officers) could hear senior staff speak of such events so they might feel less alone. It would be useful for staff in police organisations to hear senior officers acknowledge and speak of publicly the trauma, shock, sleeplessness, anxiety, loss, pain, grief or other mental health injuries that senior officers may have sustained – and recovered from – earlier in their long and successful careers.

The empirical findings presented in this chapter underpin a number of implications and recommendations. As such, it would appear that while there are many challenges faced by those working in a police organisation, there are also a range of responses that can be implemented that could make a significant difference to those in that workplace. The effect of these responses are wide ranging which can include building and establishing trust as well as improving communication amongst those in the organisation, which ultimately contributes to the cultivation of wellbeing amongst police officers.

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