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## Coping Experiences of 911 Communication Workers

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Graduate Program in Psychology  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of  
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COPING EXPERIENCES OF 911 COMMUNICATION WORKERS

Spine Title: Coping Experiences of 911 Communication Workers

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Sarah G. Horsford

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

School of Graduate and Postdoctoral studies

The University of Western Ontario

London, Ontario

April 2012

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

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Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this research to call talkers and dispatchers for their perseverance and crucial role in helping to keep the public safe. Especially, to the participants of this communication centre, I am privileged to have heard their inspirational and amazing stories as well as the bravery in each of their voices. In addition, this research is dedicated to police officers and other emergency responders who risk their lives and emotional wellbeing for the sake of others and who would not be able to do their job and return home without the support of communication workers.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my dear friend, Taj Bitar, who never allowed me to doubt myself and always believed in my ability to achieve great things.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the Communications Personnel and the Platoon Sergeants at the communication centre for allowing me to come into their lives, watch them work, sit with them during their calls and answer my many questions. I feel so honoured to have been given the unique opportunity to have this experience and to bear witness to your stories.

I would also like to thank the management of this organization and staff of the communication centre.

I am also grateful to my cousin, for her constant support throughout the development of this thesis, for without this help, the seeds of an idea would not have come to fruition.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends and colleagues for their unending support and reassurance throughout the process of writing this thesis.

## **Abstract**

This research explored coping experiences among emergency communications personnel. Ten individuals from a communication centre of a policing unit in Ontario participated in semi-structured interviews. Seven themes emerged to form the content analysis including Meaning-Focused Coping, Emotion-Focused Coping, Problem-Focused Coping, Reappraisal, Comm Centre Culture, Occupational Dimensions and Organizational Structure. Themes were compared to workplace stress, coping and burnout literature in addition to literature regarding organizational interventions and emergency responders. Implications were presented for counselors working with communications personnel and emergency responders.

**Keywords:** Emergency Personnel; Coping; Stress; Burnout; Secondary Trauma; Compassion-Fatigue; Emotional Labour

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

There is significant literature on the causes and effects of workplace stress. This literature points to the importance of managing stress in order to prevent burnout, which is “a combination of an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment” (Cicognani, Pietrantonio, Palestini & Prati, 2009, p. 450). The purpose of the study is to identify the ways that a particular group of emergency responders cope with the demands of their work and determine, through comparison to the literature, how their coping experiences are similar to and different than others in high stress jobs.

Emergency (911) communication workers provide telecommunications services using terminals and peripheral computerized equipment to dispatch emergency vehicles (e.g. ambulances and police) in response to urgent situations within a given area (Ontario Provincial Police, 2009). When communication workers respond to telephone enquiries, they receive information from distressed callers. With the information they dispatch emergency assistance. They select and prioritize the type of assistance based on the urgency of the situation and availability of responders.

Communication workers are located in centres available by telephone 24 hours per day, 7 days per week (Ontario Provincial Police, 2009). As a result, shift-work is necessary. A screening process for new recruits includes a full background security investigation as well as a written exam and interview. An additional test is used to determine abilities in basic computer and keyboarding skills, word processing, oral and written communication skills, geographic knowledge, listening skills, memory skills, multi-tasking and stress management. After passing the screening a significant amount of



training follows. Employees are typically hired on a contract basis with the possibility of future full time (permanent) employment after a probationary period.

Communication workers are both similar to and different from other emergency responders. Similarly, they work rotating shifts and are often the first point of contact for individuals in emergency situations. They also provide support to distressed individuals, use problem-solving, stress management, prioritization and multi-tasking to manage the situation (Ontario Provincial Police, 2009). However, they do not have face-to-face contact with individuals they are providing support to. They rely solely on verbal communication to obtain information and operate at a distance that does not allow the same sense of control that other emergency responders have. As a result, communication workers must rely heavily on the questions they pose and on only what they hear in the caller's language, voice and surroundings to assess and respond. Because they are always the first contact they rarely learn of the outcomes of the incidents with which they assist.

Primary trauma exposure refers to those who have witnessed a tragic event and have experienced traumatic symptoms as a result (Conner, 2007). Emergency responders such as police, fire and ambulance staff are routinely exposed to primary trauma. Secondary trauma refers to those who do not have direct contact with the event. These individuals do not typically witness the event themselves but may be traumatised through reading, hearing or talking about the event. In addition, empathizing with individuals who have experienced a traumatic event can lead to secondary trauma. Communication workers are considered to be at high risk for experiencing secondary trauma (Jenkins, 1997). Their work, not unlike other emergency responders, also carries a heavy emotional

component. Emotional labour refers to the effort one puts forth to maintain composure or manage emotion (Hochschild, as cited in Opengart, 2005).

### **Benefits of this Research**

Communication workers operate in high stress environments. They are continually exposed to potential for trauma and paid for their emotional labor. In the existing literature there is a large body of research describing the effects of stress, coping and burnout for emergency responders such as police officers, fire responders and ambulance workers, as well as health care workers, such as hospital nurses and physicians, and mental health workers such as psychiatric nurses, counselors and front-line staff (see Swider & Zimmerman, 2010 for example). However, the literature associated specifically with communication workers is sparse. Of the literature that does exist, it is largely related to critical incident stress and does not take into account the effects of occupational stress in response to everyday call taking and dispatch activities (Jenkins, 1997; Kapucu & Van Wart, 2006; Halpern, Gurevich, Schwartz, & Brazeau, 2008). Of note, there are no published Canadian studies on the coping experiences of communication workers.

This research is needed. Primarily, it is important to recognize the demands of the role that communication workers play in emergency responding as well as ways they manage stress and traumatic experiences. This understanding can be used to help maximize effectiveness and wellbeing as well as prevent burnout for this group. Indeed, communication workers who are healthy and effective are less likely to take stress leave or sick time and more likely to provide high quality service to distressed callers and other emergency responders (Swider, & Zimmerman, 2010).

Researchers will benefit from the results of this study. One application of findings is validation of the coping strategies and precursors to burnout among members of this particular group of emergency responders. The coping experiences described herein are both similar and different from the experiences of other emergency responders such as police, fire and ambulance service providers. This recognition provides researchers with avenues for exploration of preventive efforts or intervention for emergency responders in general. In addition, differences provide useful direction for optimizing organizational practices in relation to recruitment and retention of communication workers and lead to topics for future research.

Counsellors will also benefit from the experiences of communication workers on coping. Such information will aid helping professionals who provide support to emergency responders and communication workers in particular, to prevent and recover from burnout. For example, communication worker's experiences have implications for counsellors to establish new ways to help and support Police, Fire and Ambulance personnel experiencing problematic stress.

### **Structure of this Thesis**

In the second chapter, literature on workplace stress, burnout and coping is reviewed. In addition literature on secondary trauma exposure and emotional labour are discussed as well as the particular stressors of shift-work, lack of nonverbal cues and lack of control that are experienced by communication workers. In the third chapter the methodology is described including background on the method, engagement process, participants, data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness. Chapter four is a description of the results from interviews with participants and in chapter five the

participants' experiences are compared and contrasted with the literature to identify similarities and differences.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

There is a considerable literature base on coping with workplace stress (Marchand, Demers, & Durand, 2005). Workplace stress may develop into burnout and healthy coping prevents it. There are variety of studies that have examined the relationship between stress, burnout and coping in high stress occupations. These occupations have similar characteristics to those of communication workers. However, as coping experiences vary (Folkman, & Moskowitz, 2004), it is important that researchers and clinicians understand a particular group's experience of coping. There are a variety of work features specific to communication workers. These features may act as additional contributors to workplace stress and are therefore important to describe.

### **Workplace Stress**

Work can be defined as the application of mental or physical effort for a particular purpose (LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, & Ostry, 2010). Stress is a broad concept that has been described in several ways (Marchand, Demers, & Durand, 2005), but can be viewed as a process representing an individual's responses triggered by perceived lack of resources to solve a problem (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). Stress in the workplace can promote and detract from health in a number of ways (LaMontagne & Keegel, 2009). An optimal amount of stress is motivating and associated with productivity and satisfaction (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Theories and models of individual experiences of workplace stress (Israel, Baker et al., 1996; Huang, Feuerstein et al., 2002), characterize contributors as perceptual, psychological, physical and behavioural (LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, & Ostry, 2010).

According to Cox (1993) workplace stress includes both physiological and psychological components, where the psychological experience is evidenced through cognitive and emotional aspects. Specifically, stress is a sequence of events including “the presence of demands, a set of evaluative processes, through which those demands are perceived as significant (in terms of threat, and in terms of its impact on individual resources or requiring of the individual something other than normal functioning), and the generation of a response that typically affects the wellbeing of the individual” (Mackay, Cousins, Kelly, Lee, & McCaig, 2004, p. 93).

Three models have been used to describe the work-specific components of stress (LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, Ostry, 2010; Huang, et al. 2002; Grosch & Sauter, 2005). The Demand-Control model (DCM) (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) focuses on task-level job characteristics and theorizes that perceived stress arises from low control with high demands producing ‘job strain’. Low levels of support from co-workers and supervisors, in conjunction with low control and high demand, contribute to ‘iso-strain’ which is particularly hazardous (Johnson & Hall, 1988). The Effort Reward Imbalance (ERI) model (Siegrist, 1996) focuses on the reciprocity of exchange in the workplace where high cost/low gain conditions (e.g. high effort and low reward, so called ‘effort/reward imbalance’) are considered particularly stressful (LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, & Ostry, 2010). Measures of organisational justice or equity include procedural and relational components such as perceived fairness or equity of decision-making within the organization and perceived fairness and respect given to an individual by the supervisor (Kivimaki, et al. 2003).

The experience of stress can be associated with short-term responses (LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, & Ostry, 2010) that are physiological (e.g. elevated blood pressure), psychological (e.g. rigidity) and behavioural (e.g. substance use). Such responses may be associated with longer-term health effects that are physiological (e.g. coronary heart disease), psychological (e.g. anxiety disorder) and behavioural (e.g. alcoholism). However, a range of social, biophysical, and genetic factors influence each component. As well, pathways to stress responses become complicated as feedback loops occur (e.g. long-term health effects may lead to increased risk for other job stressors) and stressors interact (e.g. physiological and behavioural) (Lindstrom & Mantysalo, as cited in LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, & Ostry, 2010).

Health issues have been linked to excessive work-related stress. Various mental health outcomes ranging from increased visits for psychiatric treatment, to psychological distress, general mental health, depressive symptoms, depression, anxiety and suicide (Niedhammer, et al. 1998; Stansfeld, et al. 1998; Stansfeld & Candy, 2006; Ostry, et al. 2007) have been identified. Job stress may also influence health indirectly by fostering a range of behaviours with negative impact such as cigarette smoking, higher body weight, poor diet and lack of exercise (Eakin 1997; Siegrist & Rodel, 2006). The overall evidence is mixed, but appears strongest for the co-occurrence of multiple risky health behaviours as a result of excessive work-related stress (Siegrist & Rodel, 2006). Burnout is often included among measures of psychological illness because of the large volume of literature suggesting that it is a prolonged response to chronic workplace stressors (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Leiter, 1993).

## **Burnout**

Various conceptualizations of health-related effects resulting from workplace stress have been developed (Swider, & Zimmerman, 2010). Of these effects, burnout has become one of the most widely acknowledged. It has been defined as the result of constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981). Burnout is also the affective reaction and response to ongoing stress which can cause a deterioration or depletion of emotional and cognitive resources (Shirom, 2003). Cumulative workplace stressors have an impact on the way that individuals experience their work, their tasks, their organization and their coworkers, clients and themselves. Burnout is a psychological syndrome (Swider, & Zimmerman, 2010) characterized by emotional exhaustion, de-personalization in dealings with service recipients and a lack of sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). Those with burnout may also experience “physical illnesses, sleep disturbances, work/family conflict, and substance abuse” (Swider, & Zimmerman, 2010, p.487).

More specifically, there are various symptoms associated with burnout that can be categorized as health indicators, excessive behaviour indicators, attitude indicators and relationship indicators (SECASA, 2009). Health indicators include increased colds, flu, headaches, sudden weight gain/loss, sleep disorders and flare up of pre-existing medical conditions (e.g. ulcers, diabetes, blood pressure, asthma). Excessive behaviour indicators include increased consumption of alcohol, drugs, tobacco and/or caffeine, over/under eating, or an increase impulsivity or risk taking behaviour. Attitude indicators may include cynicism, ‘sick’ humour, anger at clients, expressions of futility and



hopelessness. Relationship indicators include emotional distancing from clients, isolation from staff or an over bonding (time and energy) to staff and programs, increased judgmental behaviour and interpersonal conflicts.

Organizations are significantly affected by employee burnout. Widely acknowledged effects of burnout on organizations include job turnover, absenteeism and lateness, as well as decreased client and co-worker interactions and reduced job performance (Swider, & Zimmerman, 2010). These effects cost a significant amount of time and money. Three levels have been identified for consideration when assessing the nature of experience with burnout. These levels include organizational, occupational and individual differences and are consistent with frameworks for coping in the workplace stress literature.

### **Coping**

Coping refers to efforts which mediate perceived excessive demands to protect individuals from psychological harm by modifying external conditions and internal processes associated with the experience (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). Coping has been characterized as emotion-, meaning- and problem-focused. Emotion-focused coping with excessive demands includes strategies used to address feelings of distress, while problem-focused coping includes strategies used to address the problem directly (Folkman, & Moskowitz, 2004). Stress may be very subjective as the product of personal appraisal and perception of experience. Failing to cope with demands and the consequences of stress serves to compound the effect. It has been suggested that organizational systems utilize work redesign interventions to promote staff wellness that

emphasize self-efficacy (e.g. enhance personal resources) to promote healthy coping with change in general (Mackay, et al., 2004).

In a review of workplace coping studies it was concluded that individual focused approaches such as skill development in time management favorably affected individual-level outcomes such as health and health behaviors (LaMontagne, Keegel et al. 2007). However, individual level interventions tended not to have favorable impacts at the organizational level such as reducing absence due to sickness. At the organizational-level, interventions used to increase job control had individual health benefits. For example, reductions in anxiety and depression were found when employee control increased. It was also found, although less consistently, that these reductions occurred when demands decreased or support increased (Egan, Bambra et al. 2007).

### **Stress, Coping and Burnout**

Multiple studies have focused on workplace stress and burnout to gain an understanding of what coping approaches have a preventive effect. Individual level coping styles have been studied. As well, the recognition of interplay between stress and coping experiences adds complexity to the study of protective factors against burnout. However, there are promising efforts made at the organizational level to prevent staff burnout and some lessons learned about staff wellness in large for-profit business are finding application in law enforcement where initial studies are showing positive results.

**Individual style.** Individual level coping has been studied in emergency responder populations. Results suggest that there is variation in methods of healthy coping. The relationship between stress coping and burnout among psychiatric nurses highlighted the use of problem-solving among men and cognitive reinterpretation among

women (Sasaki, Kitaoka-Higashiguchi, Morikawa, & Nakagawa, 2009). Among firefighters active coping was positively associated with satisfaction and support, in contrast to avoidant coping, which was not (Cicognani, Pietrantonio, Palestini, & Prati, 2009). Among emergency dispatchers social support was positively viewed and related to positive adjustment following critical incident stress (Jenkins, 1997).

**Stress and coping interplay.** Additional concepts studied among those in emergency responders include hypervigilance and emotional labour. They demonstrate the interplay between stress and coping responses. Hypervigilance could be characterized as coping with unpredictable and threatening situations, and emotional labour could be characterized as stress from putting on a brave front in a crisis situation. However, these concepts have been characterized as stress and coping respectively, in the literature.

Among police officers, for example, emotional survival is constantly threatened because of awareness of potential danger (Gilmartin, 2002). Hypervigilance is necessary for survival. Adrenaline promotes alertness, improved hearing, faster reaction time, elevated heart rate and increased blood sugar (Herman, 1992). Recovery from that state is takes approximately 18 to 24 hours. Work schedules create a “hypervigilance biological rollercoaster” with long-term effects resulting in burnout.

Emotional labour is emotional regulation and the display of particular emotions as part of one’s job. The concept has been studied in relation to emergency communication workers who are expected to maintain a calming demeanor and rational approach to crisis. Positive experiences of emotional labour such as comic relief, ability to solve problems and help others were identified (Shuler & Davenport-Sypher, 2000). From those

experiences, emotional labour could be viewed as healthy coping among individuals in a high stress job as emergency responders.

**Organizational initiatives.** It can be argued that workplace stress depends on how jobs are constructed, constituted and managed (Dollard & Winefield, 2002 as cited by Caulfield, Chang, Dollard, & Elshaug, 2004). Organizational interventions have been classified into *primary*, *secondary*, or *tertiary* (Kendall et al., 2000, as cited by Caulfield, et al. 2004). Primary approaches include strategies to prevent occurrence of work stress, while secondary approaches are designed to change an individual reaction to stressors (e.g., by means of relaxation training and team building) and tertiary approaches are used to treat the symptoms of stress after they have been identified (Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, 2010).

Organizational approaches focused on three levels of prevention have been further developed (De Jonge & Dollard, as cited in Caulfield et al. 2004) into strategies within each level, emphasizing the individual, organization or both (Caulfield et al. 2004). For example, improving work content, fitness and career development, in addition to communication, decision-making and conflict management workshops. Additional suggestions include peer support groups, coaching and career planning services as well as posttraumatic stress assistance programs and group psychotherapy.

Preliminary evidence exists for positive outcomes among staff participating in wellness initiatives. For example, health problems like cancer, heart disease, respiratory problems and hypertension, which have been linked to lifestyle choices such as smoking, poor nutrition and lack of exercise, have lowered frequency among those participating in workplace wellness programs (Reference for Business, 2012). In addition, absenteeism

and turnover have been found to decrease and productivity increased (Reference for Business, 2012). Staff “buy in” is crucial. While big for-profit businesses such as Google, which is known as one of the top of FORTUNE's "100 Best Companies to Work For", have achieved positive results with workplace wellness programs, positive results have also been achieved within the law enforcement profession.

Massachusetts State Police have produced interesting findings supporting the use of wellness programs (Gilmartin, 2002) through physical activity, time management and compartmentalization strategies. Paid physical activity is well received, utilized, monitored and reinforced (Kotz, 2011). In addition, time management workshops and clarity about time on the job and off the job promote a sense of control and prioritization of aspects of one’s life allowing for the establishment of multiple roles and ability to separate from work role when off the job (Boudo, 2009). Reduced sleep disturbance and increased healthy body mass were found among participants (Rajaratnam, et al., 2011), and the results were expected to also have protective effect against depression, anxiety and burnout (Kotz, 2011).

While there is some evidence about the effectiveness of particular individual coping strategies among emergency service providers and mounting evidence of the impact of workplace wellness programs for staff in large for-profit business, the literature on coping among communication workers is minimal. In order to explore their coping experiences, a description of features of the work setting is provided to identify some potentially important or salient features of stress that they experience.

## **Workplace Characteristics of Communication Workers**

There are several characteristics that may contribute to workplace stress among communication workers. These characteristics include shift-work, secondary trauma exposure, lack of nonverbal cues, emotional labour and lack of control.

**Shift-work.** Shift-work challenges an individual's ability to obtain a good quality sleep (Moorcroft, 2003). Many shift workers experience poor quality and quantity of sleep due to disrupted circadian rhythms (Moorcroft, 2003). Communication workers are required to provide continuous call taking around the clock. Shift work disturbs their circadian rhythms and many suffer from a condition known as 'shift lag' or desynchrony (Berger & Hobbs, 2006).

Although there have not been studies specifically on the effect of shift work among communication workers, there has been a great deal of research on the effects of shift work among nursing professionals. In one study more than 50% reported severe sleep disturbances considered a risk factor affecting their own health (Akerstedt, 2003), the health of their families and on their social participation (Labyak, Lava, Turek & Zee, 2002). Night-shift nurses were found to have poorer sleep quality than day-shift nurses (Kunert, King & Kolkhorst, 2007). Female nurses generally had worse health and sleep problems than male nurses (Admi et al. 2008).

In general, sleep that is obtained by shift-workers is of poorer quality because it is fragmented by arousals (Moorcroft, 2003). Sleep disturbances in shift-workers expose them to physical, mental, emotional and social stress and cause significant problems with mood, health, mental skills and performance (Harrington, 1994). As a result of sleep disruptions, shift-workers experience more problems than 'day workers'. They also report

more frequent negative mood states and emotional problems as well as tend to have a greater dependency on sleep medication (Moorcroft, 2003).

**Secondary trauma.** The diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) recognize that learning about trauma experienced by a family member or close friend can elicit symptoms of PTSD. While listening to traumatic details of a traumatic experience the listener becomes witness to the traumatic reality (Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995), it has also been noted that secondary trauma can be a result of engaging empathically with anyone who may have experienced trauma (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Several terms have been used to describe this experience including secondary trauma exposure, secondary traumatic stress and, more recently, vicarious traumatization. The terms are used interchangeably in the literature (Sabin-Farrell & Turpin, 2003). Compassion fatigue may occur among those who have experienced secondary trauma with jobs in care giving roles who focus too much on others without taking care of themselves (Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, 2010).

Secondary trauma has been described by journalists, police, emergency room personnel, shelter staff, prison guards, clergy, attorneys and researchers (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995), as well as mental health care workers (Sabin-Farrell & Turpin, 2003). Communication workers routinely experience traumatic events (Lanier, 2008). Several symptoms are associated with secondary trauma and lack of self-care (Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, 2010). Individual symptoms can include excessive blaming, bottled up emotions, isolation from others, complaints about administrative functions, poor self-care, reoccurrence of nightmares and flashbacks to traumatic event, chronic

physical ailments such as gastrointestinal problems and recurrent colds and difficulty concentrating. These difficulties can result in high absenteeism, desire among staff members to break company rules, lack of flexibility among staff members, negativism towards management and an inability among staff to believe improvement is possible.

A Canadian study of child protection workers revealed that individual, incident and organizational factors combined to produce post-traumatic stress distress, but that the strongest predictor of distress was the organizational environment (Regehr, Hemsworth, Leslie, Howe, & Chau, 2004). This particular study had important implications for communication workers. For example, if less recent and less frequent distress relates to lower distress and ongoing chronic stress of environment can be a stressor, then it is probable that the work environment of communication workers would also contribute to their stress. In addition, the study supported the role of meaningful relationships in mediating vicarious traumatization.

**Lack of nonverbal cues.** Those in helping professions communicate much of their attending and listening through nonverbal behaviors and their clients are often observed through nonverbal behavior to determine what they are experiencing (Hill, 2009). There is some research to support the contention that individuals rely more heavily on either verbal or nonverbal cues when detecting stress in others (Vande, Creek, & Watkins, as cited in Knapp & Hall, 2010). However, researchers (Archer & Akert, as cited in Hill, 2009) have suggested nonverbal behaviors have a superior role in communicating emotions than do verbal behaviors. These researchers suggest that individuals tend to communicate their true emotions through nonverbal expressions rather than verbal ones. Furthermore, they have stated that nonverbal behaviors are a more



reliable indicator of emotion when a discrepancy exists between verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Haase & Tepper, as cited in Hill, 2009). As communication workers are constantly involved with only verbal communication during calls it is probable that they are missing information from their callers that would be provided through nonverbal cues.

**Emotional labour.** Emotional labour refers to the job requirement to display particular emotions (Hochschild, as cited in Opengart, 2005). This concept is highly applicable to the work of communication workers who are expected to maintain a calm demeanor and rational problem solving when faced with crisis situations (Shuler & Davenport-Sypher, 2000). The challenge is greatest for those who are on the inside feeling the emotional effects of the content and experience of the caller in crisis while acting as if they are not affected. Emotional labour becomes burnout when the individual can no longer separate feelings of personal distress from the experience of the client (Kovacs, Kovacs & Hegedus, 2010).

Research on emotional labour among members of different high stress populations finds that more experienced oncology nurses, for example, have lower levels of emotional exhaustion and healthier levels of emotional dissonance reflecting a clear separation between emotional self and client emotion (Kovacs, Kovacs & Hegedus, 2010). Other high stress positions, such as government bureaucracy, that do not have require contact with individuals in crisis, staff ability to distinguish between their own and others emotionality was high (Steinberg, 1999). Emotional labour is a component of the work that communication workers do and there is increasing recognition of the effort it requires (Mastracci, Newman, & Guy, 2006).

**Low control.** According to the workplace Demand-Control Model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) workplace control attenuates the effect of workplace demands on health and well being. If the workplace consists of too much demand and not enough control then it produces 'job strain'. However, this model may only hold when there is a match between workplace control and individual characteristics that relate to exercising control options such as locus of control or self-efficacy (Meier, Semmer, Elfering, & Jacobshagen, 2008).

Studies have shown that work reorganization, in the context of occupational health psychology, changes the organization and alleviates stress related outcomes such as poor mental health, job dissatisfaction, absence due to sickness and poor work performance. More specifically, work reorganization intervention increases perceived job control by furthering the extent to which employees had discretion and choice in their work, which in turn improves stress-related outcomes (Bond & Bunce, 2001). Moreover, results in this line of research show significant improvement in mental health, sickness absence rates and self-rated performance among staff at a 1-year follow-up. As communication workers have little control over the types of calls they receive, the outcome of these calls and the emotional content with decision-making responsibility that they deal with, it would seem that increasing control in other aspects of the workplace would be significantly important to their overall well being.

**Summary of workplace characteristics.** There are several characteristics of communication worker's workplace that together contribute to a unique work environment. These features include shift-work, secondary trauma exposure, lack of nonverbal cues, emotional labour and low control. This combination of workplace

characteristics may not only have an effect on the type of occupational stress experienced by these workers, but also may also affect their ability to effectively cope with this stress in order to prevent burnout (Marchand, Demers, & Durand, 2005). For example, shift-work may contribute to the overall decrease in health and ability to cope in these workers (Harrington, 1994). Secondary trauma exposure may cause symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress that may lead to burnout (Lanier, 2008). Lack of nonverbal cues may increase the stress experienced by workers to obtain information from clients and prioritize severity of calls (Elkman, as cited in Harrigan, Rosenthal, & Scherer, 2005). The amount of emotional labour or emotion management these workers must maintain may also lead to burnout (Kovacs, Kovacs, & Hegedus, 2010). Lastly, the lack of control these workers experience, not only in their workplace, but also in the work they are assigned and outcomes of that work may increase occupational stress (Meier, Semmer, Elfering & Jacobshagen, 2008).

### **Summary and Relationship to Present Study**

The literature focusing on emergency responders is based on the notion that front line in-person confrontation with injury and death is a major source of stress (Jenkins, 1997). Communication workers are exposed routinely but exclusively to trauma at some interpersonal distance on the job. Their trauma exposure and pressure to perform emotional labour in a stressful work environment are contributing factors to stress. Potential job stressors including shift-work, absence of physical or nonverbal cues and little control over or closure to the call may also have a cumulative effect. It is possible that hypervigilance plays a role in the functioning of communication workers over the long term as it does with those in law enforcement. In sum, hearing stories of trauma

while maintaining composure with little control of the outcome, in addition to very rarely learning this outcome could result as a main source of occupational stress in this population. However, very little is known about the ways they cope with stressors on a daily basis and what these implications mean in terms career longevity for communication workers.

Greater knowledge of coping among communication workers can lead to the use of existing research to help establish suitable preventive and remedial measures to help manage personal and organizational effects when experiencing excessive levels of stress. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of coping with the daily demands of the job performed by communication workers.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of coping among communication workers. A description of the research process includes background on ethnographic research, engagement process, description of participants, data collection and analysis procedures employed.

A qualitative approach was selected for the study because of the lack of research specifically on communication workers experiences of coping and the opportunity for thick description of their shared realities to inform future research. Qualitative methods provided the flexibility to follow subtleties of participant experience and required inclusion of researcher in the process. The researcher's personal experience in the helping field was an aid to understanding the experiences of the helpers in the present study and allowed for personal reflections about the process and results for similarities and differences. Ethnography provided the best approach for the researcher who immersed herself into the community and culture of the workplace shared by study participants.

#### **Ethnography**

Ethnographic research dates back to the early 1920s and has been shaped through cultural anthropology (Creswell, 2007). This method involves procedures for describing, analyzing and interpreting a culture of members' shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs and language that develop over time. The practice of ethnography is conducted when the researcher is seeking the understanding of a particular issue within a culture-sharing group or to obtain understanding of the day-to-day life of members of a particular cultural group. The degree of immersion depends on the particular approach taken with the study.

Common approaches to ethnographic research include case study ethnography, critical ethnography and realist ethnography. Case study ethnographies focus on a bounded system, often time and place, and include different sources of data from which to identify common features of the experience across selected “cases”. Critical ethnography starts from the perspective of change to the status quo and represents what is not well represented in order to advocate for a particular issue among group members in cultural context. This study employs a realist ethnographic approach. This approach is considered to be the least intrusive and necessitates the lowest level of immersion in the culture. The researcher’s role is that of an outsider. The intent of the research is to represent the participant’s views through direct quotes and careful documentation of each step of the collection and analysis process.

### **Engagement Process**

Communication centre operations exist within the police agency. At the time of this study, the communication centre had been centralized for approximately ten years. The researcher approached the police agency personally to request permission for the study and the response was very positive. A proposal, reflected in the contents of the first three chapters of this thesis, was provided to the police agency and formal permission to access the communication centre staff for research purposes was granted. The researcher’s Advisory Committee and university Ethics Committee approved the same proposal.

First contact with potential participants was made via email, with an advertisement for the study distributed to employees by the agency with the request to follow up directly with the researcher if interested in participation (see Appendix A). It

was noted that the researcher would be on site in the communication centre for observations. Participants approached the researcher by telephone and in-person while she was on site. Participants were offered alternative sites for the interview, but all chose to be interviewed in a private location within the facility.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews continued until a point of saturation. Saturation was defined as three consecutive interviews with no novel information. The researcher conducted a total of 10 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Each interview took approximately 60 to 75 minutes to complete. All interviews took place in a small boardroom within the organization's facility. The interview area was in a secluded portion of the centre that allowed for privacy from coworkers. At the beginning of each interview participants were provided with an information letter and consent form (see Appendix B). All interviews were audio-recorded and permission to do so was obtained. This information was transcribed to have an accurate and complete record of what was said. Each interview began with demographic questions before turning to open-ended questions and finally, debriefing (see Appendix C). The researcher's presence within the communication centre was over the course of three weeks during which she spent over 40 hours observing.

### **Participants**

Participants were employees of the police agency and staff members of a communication centre that received all 911 calls. As a requirement of their job each completed initial job training and at the time of interview, was to have been employed in the centre for at least one year. There were seven female and three male participants, consistent with the overall ratio of men to women in the centre. Ages ranged from late

20's to early 50's and years of service ranged from 6 years to 24 years. All of the participants were Caucasian. Participants had varying levels of education including high school graduation, as well as college and university courses and certificates and post-secondary graduation with diploma or degree.

### **Analysis of Data**

After completing the interviews, each was transcribed verbatim. The researcher read all transcripts and performed a qualitative content analysis procedure on the transcribed raw data to identify commonalities across interviews and construct the themes (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis procedure included six steps. The first two steps were the (1) transcription of verbal data and (2) reading through all transcripts to get a general sense of meaning. (3) Meaning units were located within the transcripts. (4) Each meaning unit was coded (see Appendix D). (5) The codes were then combined into themes (see Appendix E). (6) Finally, the themes were described (the results are presented in Chapter 4), and compared and contrasted with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (this discussion is presented in Chapter 5).

An example of a meaning unit is *Usually you'll have a coworker talk to you and ask here okay, or follow you out it and say yeah you all right or that was a bad one kind of thing and you know you sort of speak with them if I have a really bad call. I would want to talk to somebody about it here before I leave because I can't go home and talk about it contract wise, and the stuff that you go home with and say nobody else outta here would get it you know* (Participant 1). This particular meaning unit was coded as *Team Support* and was placed in the theme *Comm Centre Culture*.



## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is promoted in qualitative research to support the research findings or results in a similar way to the use of validity, soundness and significance in quantitative research. In qualitative research, trustworthiness can be addressed through enhancing the four issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Gruba, as cited in Shenton, 2004). Credibility accounts for the evaluation of results as a *credible* representation of the original data provided by participants (Gruba, as cited in Shenton, 2004). In this study credibility was promoted through prolonged engagement with participants within the communication centre, thorough description of source data was used in presenting resulting thematic information. Saturation was also required when determining the appropriate number of participants interviewed (Morrow, 2005). After the completion of seven interviews with novel information in each, the eighth, ninth and tenth interviews were deemed necessary to confirm the similarities across participants' experiences.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of this study can be applied or transferred to those outside of this project (Gruba, as cited in Shenton, 2004). Transferability was promoted by providing detailed information regarding the researcher and the researcher's unique relationship to the communication centre, as well as detailed information about the communication centre as a research environment, and the involvement of the process for engagement, execution of the ethnographic research, and description of participant considerations. Furthermore, the level of generalizability cannot be commented on due to the small sample size of participants used in this research. As a result, although the findings obtained from the research provide directions for future

research in understanding the coping experiences of communication workers or other emergency responders, they cannot be considered to generalize directly to these populations.

Dependability can be considered an evaluation of the integration of processes including data collection, data analysis and as a result, theory generation (Gruba, as cited in Shenton, 2004). In this study, dependability was promoted through the consistent interviewing process, in which the same question protocol was used for every interview, with similar prompts and consisted of an introduction with the completion of informed consent procedures as well as debriefing. In addition, research activities were chronologically recorded through the use of a journal, which detailed processes involved in the interviewing of participants, environmental and cultural aspects of the ethnographic research, as well as information detailing the analysis and emergence of themes.

Finally, confirmability is an appraisal in the comparison of research findings to the collected data (Gruba, as cited in Shenton, 2004). In this study, confirmability was promoted through the use of themes which established integrity of findings as code names were descriptors developed from the emerging data of participant experience. Also, the use of an audit trail by recording personal reflections in a journal was also useful for promoting confirmability. This journal allowed for management of subjectivity in which these reflections were included within the results.

### **Summary of Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was employed for this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of coping among communication workers. Use of ethnographic approach allowed for immersion into the community and culture of the

workplace shared by study participants. In addition, semi-structured interview questions were posed to capture participants' experiences. The interview data were analyzed using a content analysis procedure. Procedures were used to promote trustworthiness in relation to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The results are presented in the fourth chapter and a comparison of the results of data from participants to the available literature is presented in the fifth chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

Seven themes emerged from the interview data and are described in this chapter. A brief description of participants is provided. Each theme, including Meaning-Focused Coping, Emotion-Focused Coping, Problem-Focused Coping, Reappraisal, Comm Centre Culture, Occupational Dimensions and Organizational Structure is presented and illustrated by several quotes from different participants. In addition, to promote trustworthiness in context, including the realities and culture of the communication centre, an account of the researcher's personal reflections about the research topic, process and meaning of results is included.

### **Participants**

Participants included ten individuals. Participant 1 was a female in her 20's who had been a communication worker for 5 years. Participant 2 was a male in his 50's who had been a communication worker for 21 years. Participant 3 was a female in her 30's who had been a communication worker for 6 years. Participant 4 was a female in her 40's who had been a communication worker for 11 years. Participant 5 was a female in her 30's and had been a communication worker for about 10 years. Participant 6 was a female in her 30's and had been a communication worker for about 9 years. Participant 7 was a male in his 40's and had been a communication worker for 9 years. Participant 8 was a male in his 40's and has been a communication worker for 24 years. Participant 9 was a female in her 30's and had been a communication worker for 11 years. Participant 10 was a female in her 20's and had been a communication work for 6 years. Together, they had a range of educational backgrounds from high school completion to graduate study at the university level. They had studied a range of areas in the social sciences as

well as dental assistance, human services, law enforcement and security professions.

Previous work experience ranged from part-time human services work to include retail, self-employment, as well as communications and police work.

### **Themes**

The following is a brief summary of the themes. Meaning-Focused Coping referred to strategies that involved finding meaning in a stressor for personal growth or related to the job. Emotion-Focused Coping referred to addressing emotions associated with stress. Problem-Focused Coping referred to addressing difficulties directly, such as establishing a plan. Reappraisal referred to reframing an experience to alter perception of the situation. Comm Centre Culture referred to coping embodied within the norms, values and expectations experienced by workers within the communication centre. Occupational Dimensions referred to the characteristics of the communication workers related to the nature of the job and coping. Organizational Structure referred to coping related to coping within the organizational structure in a paramilitary facility and dynamics between communication workers and police.

**Meaning-focused coping.** Meaning-focused coping referred to strategies that involved finding meaning in a stressor for personal growth or in support of the job. Ability to cope with specific situations was based on ability to derive a sense of meaning from the situation and context to integrate into sense of self. Different approaches were taken to finding the meaning in their work.

Participants found meaning in their ability to do their job effectively. They found a sense of personal achievement in doing a good job, knowing that they helped someone in need or that they could have been the difference between life and death.

*I like going home at the end of the day and looking at myself in the mirror and saying good job, you did the best that you could of what you had today. It's not so much the pat on the back. They sometimes can be few and far between here so...you know you just....I like the personal satisfaction knowing that you've made a difference, that you've done the best that you can, you did your best to bring everybody home at the end of the day, and unfortunately, we have had deaths here. (Participant 5)*

Participants found meaning within themselves through a sense of accomplishment when they helped by creating a positive situation out of a negative one.

*You do you have a sense of helping the community, whether it's whatever the scenario may be. There is that job satisfaction. You could be caught up in a call where you actually save somebody or help save someone, and there's no greater satisfaction than to walk out of here at the end of the day saying 'geez I actually made a difference in that call.' So that would be the ultimate high highest reward. (Participant 2)*

When participants received appreciation it typically came from the public they served. Participants also found meaning from appreciation received directly from the officers they worked with.

*I don't know if it's related or not but at the end of the day if you've had a busy shift and the officers give you positive feedback, you know what? You did a really good job today. You don't hear it a lot from this building but you get a lot of meaning from that too just knowing that, ok they appreciate what you did. (Participant 9)*

Meaning also came via job security and benefits received in their position that gave them a lifestyle they appreciated.

*We're paid a decent wage, just under \$70,000 per year, which is a decent income maybe compared to other people, and it definitely gives me the ability to do some travelling, building a house and do a lot of those things. Benefits... and my son has had braces and he has glasses. So there's those perks, the financial the job security and it's the accommodation of all of it. (Participant 5)*

Participants became accustomed to the lifestyle that made it difficult to consider alternatives.

*A lot of the stress I think for people who stay here for 30 years, because once you get in and you have the job security and the pension and the benefits, it's hard to leave. (Participant 9)*

Although shift-work was often a difficult aspect of their job, it was also one of the advantages because of the flexibility for activities available during time off.

*The time off. I'm just finishing five days off and that's just a regular schedule so that has its advantages. I was able to....I was in Toronto camping for a few days and did a bunch of different things through. (Participant 5)*

Connecting with callers through empathy or sympathy and showing compassion was also meaningful.

*So the positive side I guess of all this when I get a call like that I can so appreciate it all the more and I don't really tell the people on the other end 'oh by the way I've been through the same thing' but I'm sitting there and I think I'm more compassionate and I think I do a better job because I know that language, I know what they're going through and my heart it just goes out to them. (Participant 2)*

Participants found meaning in making improvements to how they operated and asked questions to inform those responding in order to better serve in the needs of callers.

*If I'm talking to the parents, where somebody who knows the person, what sorts of trigger should be avoided when an officer gets there? Is there something that sets this person off? And that's something I wouldn't have known to ask before but with more and more people having mental health issues, this is going to become commonplace. I find that nobody really asks that in there. I've started to do it and I've had some good results, whether the officer... well it's up to the officer, usually the officer uses his or her own judgment, but it might be good to know don't show up with the lights and sirens going because it might make things worse, or approach the person with a calm and sympathetic way. (Participant 2)*

Participants found meaning in the challenge of the job and the rush of adrenaline that came from working in a busy, high-stress, multi-tasking environment.

*Yeah I know because that is where I have a struggle with that kind of type of thing, because my good day is somebody else's absolute misfortune, right. I like the big call the rip roaring full on big calls. The adrenaline rush and what I like is the personal thing because that is when I feel challenged. (Participant 5)*

**Emotion-focused coping.** Emotion-focused coping referred to the emotions associated with stressors experienced on the job. Participants described what they did on a daily basis to manage their emotions or prevent work from eliciting emotions that would cause more stress in their off hours

Participants found that having a solid support network at home made a difference in the way they handled stress at work.

*Yeah, that part's big, to have somebody home that you can talk to or just to have somebody at home who is happy that you're home. That's big because for a long time too even after the second break up, I'd go home and wasn't anybody there, and like holy crap, you feel lonely enough but that's really lonely, the cat doesn't talk to you very much. (Participant 7)*

Personal connections with those in their personal lives helped to buffer the stress of the job. Those who understood their work were especially helpful.

*You know so those are just some of the things with the coping, where you end up with those relationships where people actually can open up, you can say you know, and friends, firefighters, that are our friends now those are the kind of things where they kind of go hand in hand where your personal relationship is as much as here can give you the opportunities. (Participant 5)*

Participants described they needed to be doing for self-care to help them separate self from their work and keep emotional balance intact outside of the job.

*You try to find something that will keep you...something different than what you do here right, but I think really your sleep, your balance, spirituality is a big one for me too. (Participant 5)*

*But I remember now like to not take things as seriously, like to remember to take of [participant's name] first because if you're taking care of [participant's name], then you're not really a benefit to anyone. So I think*



*definitely for myself, I try to do the eat properly, I take my dog for a walk everyday, which that to me is like totally therapeutic just walking and things like that. (Participant 10)*

It was challenging to clearly separate home and personal life from work because of the socializing between participants in and outside of work, as well as with officers within the organization. However, they tried not to think of work when they left at the end of their shift.

*After work I honestly, I try very hard when I leave this place not to go over and over the calls because there's so many over the course of a day and then over the course of a month and then over the course of 11 years, like I don't want to take it home. (Participant 9)*

The use of space, breath or even taking time to process a situation, by taking a moment between calls or unplugging and walking away, were described as ways of separating self from the emotional intensity of the caller and situation.

*Emotions at work, most of the time I don't feel any emotional connection with the work I'm doing. Most days there isn't anything of note that gets under my skin. Most days, like within the room, there might be, just about every shift there's somebody that gets killed somewhere so it's either death of natural causes or a car accident...But unless I'm directly involved in that then there's no real, it's like reading the newspaper, unless when you read the newspaper you get an emotional response to these things, then it's no different than being in here. (Participant 8)*

While empathy was to be conveyed in the moment separating was necessary in order to cope.

*Yes, you really have to stay separate from not. So yes you are going to be super compassionate in the moment and sympathetic in the moment and in the moment you're going to think this poor person. I mean why are you suicidal a whole string of bad things that happened to get you there and I feel bad for you and I'm going to be very sympathetic and do everything I can to put that in my voice, but at the end of the day what I need to know is, my job is to find out who you are, are you armed, where are you and get you help. I can't own anything else (Participant 1)*

Despite their best efforts, emotion becomes too much to keep inside and had to be let out.

*Occasionally I've broken down, like I've cried just because it was so intense I was just like oh my god why am I crying? But it was just so intense. (Participant 6)*

The emotionality of the work also appeared through the language used by participants and in their personal life as family or significant others drew it to their attention.

*But I think when we're having exchanges with each other and I go back to my life my partner is going to be like oh my you've been working, there's no need to swear like that here, you're swearing a lot, there's other adjectives. (Participant 1)*

Participants noted that coping with the emotional intensity of a stressful call or stressful day was handled effectively by talking about it with someone they trusted and understood where they were coming from.

*If we do get a tough call, I find I just vent to my coworkers, just oh you know this is what I just had, like I just discuss it, I'm very open that way and I feel that that helps. (Participant 6)*

Expression through debrief with professionals was also helpful.

*Because we sat down with the psychologist for an hour and a half or two hours and we talked about it, and I walked out of there, and felt like the weight of it wasn't on my shoulders anymore. So there's lots to be said for talking it out. (Participant 2)*

Avoidance was also used, particularly at home after shifts to make an emotional separation between the work and their personal life.

*And it's true that you will find this common thing, and I know this because I ask everybody. The phone ringing at home, I avoid it like the plague unless somebody...I let the answering machine pick it up for several reasons, one of the main ones is the telephone solicitors, but even then friends and family will call and it may sound rude but you know what? I gotta do what I gotta do to survive and quite literally it has come down to*

*that. I have no use, I will be on the phone to return a call and short, brief and to the point but not like my wife. (Participant 2)*

**Problem-focused coping.** Problem-focused coping referred to strategies in which the problem or situations were addressed directly via a plan to change an experience or circumstance.

Because of the stress of the job participants experienced medical issues. Through support of their doctor they established a plan to restore their health.

*There's very few that aren't, that have 20 years working here, that don't have some kind of doctors note to say they can do this or they can't do this, and most of them at the end, end up call talking. (Participant 8)*

A variety of medications were described such as sleeping, anti-anxiety medications or anti-depressants, as well as those to treat other physical ailments that were exacerbated by stress, such as acid reflux disease or irritable bowel syndrome.

*I would say and I have no way of knowing this but of what little I do know, I would say there is at least a quarter of us on the floor that are on antidepressants or another type of medication. I'm taking a low dose of Ativan just in order to help me sleep. (Participant 2)*

Participants also self medicated with alcohol, drugs and smoking.

*And I'm actually fortunate, I'm one of the ones here not taking medications. I can cope and find ways to just chill out after. But I know that's a coping mechanism for a lot of them are on medication, a lot of people drink a lot here and I try to avoid the social heavy drinking, heavy smoking, heavy...just try to keep away from all of that kind of stuff but it is common coping here to. (Participant 5)*

Formalized mutual support for debriefing was evident through the Peer Assistance Resource Team (PART), a small team of communication workers who were available for coworkers (one on each platoon shift) to speak to about something difficult they experienced at work. It was a confidential service that existed only in the particular office developed by participants in response deaths of several officers.

*Now we've made, with the PART team, we've made that a priority. If somebody has had a bad call they are, we are getting them unplugged and we are getting them away from the desk for a few minutes, even if it's just to go outside for a little quick walk. Yeah know, do you want to talk about it? Do you not? It's up to you. Here's my card if you want to, that kind of thing. That would be about the extent of about what we are able to do here, unfortunately. (Participant 3)*

Participants accessed formalized professional support outside of the workplace as well.

*I have had everything...from anxiety attacks to...I managed it by going to see a psychologist and trying to figure out what I was doing. (Participant 4)*

Regardless of the source of support stigma was a challenge to overcome.

*I thought to myself like sometimes you think 'oh if I go get help it means I have a problem'. And I just think maybe you should just utilize it because maybe they will give you different insights that you don't think about or it's easier to talk to them about certain things that you wouldn't talk to someone else about. So I think we all can benefit from things like that. I don't think you can...I think awareness and talking and things like, they're that are all good things. I don't think you're going to regret it. (Participant 10)*

Participants also created their own support through planning to cope with the stress of their job effectively and proactively in the long term. Participants became involved in their own personal development and training.

*To do my job better. I don't need it for myself, so I'm taking it because it's job related, and yet yeah know we've got the people who ran the course said yeah we'll come to your workplace and do it. And I mentioned it and no, they don't want to foot the bill for it. So I footed it myself and put it through the tuition assistance. (Participant 3)*

Regular training and development has been offered increasingly through the workplace.

*When I first started 21 years ago, well it's not that long ago, but it was fly by the seat of your pants, kind of thing. Over the years I've seen the [this organization] step up to the plate and offer more training and that's good. We need even more. Yeah, a lot of times it's too little, you know.*

(Participant 2)

Sensitivity to the effects of too much stress led participants to take a problem-focused approach to cope.

*I don't think...I think that's probably one of my weaknesses that sometimes I try to be tough and I don't listen to the signs of stress so like I don't find that I ever get that stressful but then maybe like health-wise something will happen with my health that the doctor will be like that's because of stress, and I'll be like I don't feel stressed. Like I don't think I really watch for the warning signs or whatever, I mean like not sleeping properly or not eating properly or things like that. I'm just kind of like whatever but then you know it kinda catches up on you and you're maybe sick or whatever and then...so yeah? (Participant 10)*

Their awareness led to an ability to identify effects of stress in their lives and create plans to make life-style changes as needed.

*It's funny because I've been working...this is kind of a personal thing I've been trying to regain. I wasn't coping well. In years past, I was on a very healthy diet, lots of working out and exercise and soccer, gym and doing that, but for whatever reason the last two years I've just kind of no more gym, crappy eating, I'm not playing soccer anymore, my personal life is a bit chaotic, so it all seemed to go...so I'm probably more aware right now of what coping is in this job and what happens if you don't take care of yourself. (Participant 5)*

They were aware of the role physical activity and exercise played in their overall health and mental well-being. It was a challenge to maintain a healthy exercise routine because of the sedentary nature of the job, exhaustion experienced at the end a 12-hour shift and shift-work rotations. Those who managed to maintain physical activity coped better than when they did not have such a routine.

*Made a real effort with the physical exercise after work it's a thing that helps. I'll go home and come in the door and just feel like I should lay down and go to sleep. Like I'm just zonked right, like mentally, physically fatigued and I force myself to go out and run. And I always find that I feel fine after I run. One hundred percent. (Participant 8)*

**Reappraisal.** Reappraisal referred to reframing experience to positively alter perception of a stressful situation. A variety of cognitive reappraisals were used by participants to create a new context for understanding their role within their career and life in general.

Positivity was used often by participants to develop an optimistic outlook on the circumstances in their life and their coworkers to balance out the negativity of calls and situations.

*So you're gonna get out what you put in. If everybody around you is in a bad mood then you're gonna give that back out, it affects everything, everything in your day. (Participant 1)*

Participants described the importance of treating others with respect and how it increased positive energy within the workplace.

*I think I have a good relationship with them because of my other roles, and I'm not a negative person. I'm a positive person so I know I get along with everybody. I don't...it doesn't mean I like everybody, but I don't believe they know that I don't like them, I do try to be...I push that with my kids too. You don't have to like everybody but you do have to respect them, and I do respect everybody and I can work with everybody and I work well with everybody so. (Participant 3)*

Participants spoke of the appreciation they had for their own life situations. Despite the daily negativity they faced they appreciated their own good health and positive situations in their lives.

*Yeah, no I think that whenever I'm down or I feel like oh my god my life sucks, I have it for a moment but then I think like I start to think about how good I actually have it and it's just minor/minute things and that's I think like for as much bitching and complaining we do here and then you think about what we work with that we should all be thankful because we listen to you know people getting beat. We listen to kids that have been sexually assaulted, we listen to custody battle after custody battle and you think to yourself like why 2 people that created a child can't even drop them off at the right times. So I think like we see the worst of it, we see sexual assaults, we see kids being beaten, we see people dying way too early, we see tragic*

*incidents, you know TV's falling on babies and killing them, and you know we see all of that. So I think that, we don't see it directly and that's like I said, like for me hearing and actually seeing it would be a different story, but I think like to be thankful for what we have, just kinda thing that you never know what tomorrow will bring and that most of us should know that in this job that you never know so. (Participant 10)*

Participants were aware of the hard economic times and viewed their career as a real benefit to them instead of a source of stress or negativity.

*Do I like getting up at 4:30, 5 o'clock in the morning? No... You know but those are things I have chosen. I have chosen to go along with this but I see people losing jobs, people being laid off, struggling to...if they are on sick leave, they don't have pay, they don't have anything. I was off for surgery last year and had 75% pay so I didn't have to burn my vacation time you know and so it changes the older I'm getting the more appreciative maybe I am actually of what I have so the little miniscule problems or issues don't seem nearly as significant any more because I know now how much worse it could be (Participant 5)*

Many spoke of the perspective they have gained from the job over the years and how perception played a role in the work they did. They had a variety of alternative ways to view situations within their jobs.

*I guess in some ways maybe a way that I look at things that come into play is...like one day we were having a conversation here and...within the confines of the communication centre you're looking at all the calls coming in and there's you know violent things, people getting killed and just this relentless stream of ridiculousness and the one girl says the people, the public has no idea what really goes on. But the comment that I made was, so you think this is the real world, the world outside the doors of the world inside these doors?...and she says this is the real world. And I said I have the totally opposite view. I said when I walk out the door I don't see people getting killed, I don't see people fighting. I don't see any of the things we take calls for, almost never. So in my eyes what's outside, when I'm not here, is the real world and what happens in here is like the twilight zone. It isn't even real. (Participant 8)*

Participants changed the way they viewed negative calls or callers by reframing the context of the situation and making the situation less personal.

*I used to get all worked up when somebody would call and be bitching me out on the phone, and then I realized they're not pissed at me. They don't know me yet, right? If they knew me, it would be a lot louder than that (laughs). So just being able to make that separation and I didn't know how to do that at first, so I took it a lot more personal. (Participant 7)*

Participants also described the ability to focus on their home lives and their position as a means to an end.

*My first pick was nine hours because I was thinking long term in this job. Nine hours for me, with a family, with my lifestyle, that's the way it's going to go. (Participant 6)*

Commitments to family were set through a schedule and accountability to them.

*If I'm on a short shift and they're short and if I have no other commitments to my kids then I will stay, but that's only been this summer, 'cause we're so short. But usually I don't even do that, I work my shift and that's it. I do not come in for overtime. I need to be able to say to my kids this is my schedule and when it shows that I'm not at work, then I'm available to you guys. (Participant 3)*

They identified the importance of faith and spirituality within their lives.

Examples included seeking strength through spirituality, the use of guidance in time of uncertainty and seeking faith-based counselling as an approach to support.

*My faith in God and everything like that, it just at times when it's been a little overwhelming or hectic or it has been terrible trying days here, just saying a prayer, saying give me strength and courage to continue doing what you've asked me to do. I have, most people here know, I think God gives everybody a gift, an opportunity to use the skills set to make a difference in peoples' lives right and this is a hard gift but he has given a gift, right, so it's kind of a you take what he has given you. (Participant 5)*

**Comm centre culture.** Comm Centre Culture referred to coping embodied within the norms, values and expectations experienced by workers within the communication centre. Participants described the connections between one another as similar to a family. Their connections were rooted in shared experience, expectations and support. Although



this was viewed as positive support, it also had challenges associated with social pressure and exclusion.

Participants viewed the importance of maintaining connections to promote teamwork and boost morale.

*The people in here, we have strange times off together and you end up doing things together you know. So you spend a lot of time at work and outside of work with people and there are some pretty phenomenal people here to get to know and you know you do have that downtime. So at four in the morning you know you really do get to know your colleagues and I think that's kind of neat, and you have this real sense of family spending holidays with somebody or for all that. (Participant 1)*

The shared experiences promoted connections between members and at the same time isolated them from those outside who did not have the same understanding.

*I can tell people outside here, but they don't get it. They try to get it, but they can't. But somebody that's listened to something equally or more horrifying ok, yeah know? I find that to be helpful and I don't think we do enough of that here. (Participant 1)*

A particularly important shared experience that was part of the culture was dark or morbid humour. Participants described the jokes made about events that they felt the public would find grotesque. But the use of this humour relieved tension and promoted bonding.

*Oh yeah, it's tough to put a lid on that because that dark humour is beauty (laughs). It's a lot of fun. There's some really good jokes that go around, that you just can't share with the rest of the world. (Participant 7)*

Supporting one another within the broader law enforcement system of which they were a part was also noted. They had some comfort speaking with someone from their own group and there were some individuals outside of their particular group, but within the larger organization, they would approach if they needed support.

*Usually you'll have a coworker talk to you and ask here okay, or follow you out it and say yeah you all right or that was a bad one kind of thing and you know you sort of speak with them if I have a really bad call. I would want to talk to somebody about it here before I leave because I can't go home and talk about it contract wise, and the stuff that you go home with and say nobody else outta here would get it you know. (Participant 1)*

Teamwork was integral to the culture. Even if there were communication workers who did not get along they would back each other up if needed. There was also a sense that everyone looked out for each another and helped out to ensure no mistakes were made.

*This job can't be done by one person and you need to work together, the call taker and the dispatcher like so there's constant teamwork involved and I don't think...I think you really have to get along with everyone in order for the job to get done and done efficiently. (Participant 10)*

Accountability to the broader team was expected. The work had to be done. Communication workers were required to record information correctly and efficiently so that dispatchers were able to report accurate information to officers. Dispatchers were accountable to call takers to ensure the information was accurate.

*If you didn't feel any accountability to your floor and have some people could, but really you're gonna stay in, your gonna finish it out even if you might not be an All-Star for the rest your shift, but you're gonna stay and finish it out because like I said the same number of calls come in whether we have enough people to handle him or not. (Participant 1)*

There was social pressure to stay on to do the job even when feeling overwhelmed. Participants felt they were to carry on and attempt to be strong to the point that team members would miss their own and others signals of stress.

*I think like we've kind of seen some of it happen over the last year that you know all of a sudden we'll all get pulled in to the boardroom, is everyone ok and things like that. But I mean and also who wants to sit in the middle of a room and be like yeah I'm not feeling great about that. Like you know*

*what I mean? Most people are very personal so do I think there could be more focus on us? Yeah absolutely, I think it's hard and say if you wanted to walk away and you get a minute to de-stress or deep breathe, everyone would be wondering where you are so it would be very confidential anyways like, whereas in an office point of view you can kind of get away from things a little bit easier. Everyone pretty much knows where you are, and how long you've been on your break because they can see you know. (Participant 10)*

There were also smaller groups of individuals or cliques. Participants were aware of the cliques and felt as if they were excluded.

*We don't need the people slamming each other, bad mouthing or spreading rumours. I have been subject to false...and I just, really did you have nothing better to do? But I think if you talked to everybody in here, at some point in time they have been subject to a rumour that wasn't really what it was but for whatever reason a few people in here...keep it going and they have nothing better to do or say, so... (Participant 5)*

**Occupational dimensions.** Occupational dimensions referred to the particularly stressful characteristics of the job and coping in response.

The negative nature of the calls was a clear challenge.

*The downside to that is you are always dealing with negative, negative, negative day in, day out. Whether it's people dying in a car accident, you don't see it but still you deal with it by phone or by radio. So that's, I'd have to say that's a really tough pill to swallow at times and you get tired of it. (Participant 2)*

Shift-work schedules affected sleep and excluded participants from a variety of events and activities that they wanted to participate in.

*The flipside is that it is kind of tough missing Christmas every year, and looking at some of the older people here that are doing 20 years of night shifts, and flippin' all the time is maybe not going to make you age very well. (Participant 1)*

Sleep problems were associated with vulnerability to stress. It created a cyclical problem as too much stress caused sleep problems and sleep problems decreased ability to cope.

*Ummm, yeah I guess and if I'm not getting enough sleep, like if I'm not sleeping enough, you know, and I find juggling too much I get stressed.*  
(Participant 6)

Participants described their inability to obtain closure from the situations they come into contact with. They wanted to find out the outcome of calls and to do that they needed to ask permission on a case-by-case basis. There was social pressure to resist asking which they felt embarrassed about admitting to.

*We either take the call and hear the beginning of it, or in dispatch we give it out but the officer just says clear, see report. So you don't know how it ends. You're just on to the next call and very rarely do we go back and say I wonder what happened to that...you don't, you just move on to the next call.* (Participant 6)

The predictability of the work was a challenge to deal with. Workstations were assigned at check in and calls came to each with random frequency, duration and content.

*It just comes in, it's just in your ear and it's there. And if you're busy you can't necessarily walk away afterwards, right. The next call is waiting so. Or you're dispatching and you're in the middle of it while you're hearing something horrifying. You react to that and deal with afterwards.*  
(Participant 1)

Time management, prioritization and organization were ways participants gave themselves some predictability.

*On the air that as you get experienced in the job, you can control the air, you can control and say you're 3<sup>rd</sup> in line, you're 4<sup>th</sup> in line, I'm on the phone standby. But for newer people I think it's very difficult to keep up with them sometimes.* (Participant 9)

From shift to shift, or even within a shift, participants cycled through being very busy to experiencing boredom.

*So as for workload I think one day you can be crazy busy and the next day you could do nothing. Sometimes I find that that's the worse is that I like that even balance of being busy, I don't like to sit there and hello what's going on. There's nothing to do. I guess I'm not very good at entertaining myself and I think you need to entertain yourself here.* (Participant 10)

In addition to varying workload was the varying intensity of the workload. One call could be very intense with a high level of stress and the next could be simple with no urgency and strictly informational.

*Then I find that very difficult because you just, you go from taking a serious call and you're thinking about it and you're thinking did I actually ask all the right questions, did I miss anything? And two seconds later you've got a call and a totally different area of a...totally different nature and you can switch, you can switch from like that pace all day long that on the tenth hour, all of a sudden it's like oh I need a break, I can't do this I can't keep switching. Like you can do it up to a point, but then all of a sudden I, myself hit a wall. Or I'm like I can't do it anymore. (Participant 9)*

This rollercoaster was troublesome over time.

*Dr. Gilmartin wrote a book and he talks about the hypervigilance being up here all day and then you go home and you crash. Everything he talks about is true so my goal is not have, not allow myself to go up during the day at work as much as possible. So my goal is not to be in that hypervigilant state through the whole shift. Sometimes I'm very successful at that, other times not because you get busy with important things you have to kind of bring the thing up...and then dispatch you have to kind of be alert enough that when something changes on the screen that you pick it up right away so there's a certain amount of vigilance required for that. (Participant 8)*

When participants finally decompressed after being in a state of arousal for such a long period of time their bodies needed time to recover and they found themselves feeling lethargic, passive and detached. They described this as the “crash” they experienced at the end of a shift.

*Unfortunately, you go home and sit in front of the TV...Yeah you don't have to think, you don't have to... You don't have to process that you have to come up with a decision, you're just sitting there and pretending you're just responding and it's such a...It's a lazy break but it's very effective. (Participant 5)*

The 30-minute break within each 12-hour shift was a challenge to manage.

*I think what comes with that then it spirals into other things. Because when you get weight issues because you somehow have to manage in 30 minutes to prepare your food, eat your food and pop right down into your desk. So your weight issue is that you get people with diabetes or sugar issues. It doesn't give you time really to ...rush, rush, rush, you rush, rush, rush, you can be at a busy desk....rush, rush, rush, rush, to your lunch.*  
(Participant 5)

Participants were unsure whether they would stay in the job for the duration of their career. They noted that over time it became increasingly difficult to remain healthy and responsive.

*I don't know if it fits in to what you're doing at all but I've been thinking about this whole issue for a long time and I watch my coworkers go down in a heap, one after the other, whether they get to a certain age or length of time doing work and I'm pretty much convinced that, unless you want to, you shouldn't be doing this for longer than 10 or 15 years. I just don't think you should be here after that. Because you can't do it well beyond that in my mind, or you're not. Not everybody can do it well. Like maybe, I don't know... Age, it's harder, it gets hard with time...to be sharp.*  
(Participant 8)

**Organizational structure.** Organizational structure referred to coping related to the organizational structure in a paramilitary facility and the dynamics between communication workers and officers. The workers were *civilian employees*, the officers were *uniforms* and anyone within administration who was an officer was a *white shirt*. Participants were aware of their low ranks and status relative to the others in the organization. They were managed by *uniforms* who had not themselves been communication workers.

*Yeah, like within the organization, as being a civilian employee essentially a second class employee within the organization, if you're a police officer then...and not to say they haven't earned, like anyone a police officer has earned that position but in this organization that make you qualified to anything. You could fly the space shuttle, for the space station. You could build a rocket, but if you're a civilian, you're not qualified to do anything in the organization. There's tons of jobs in the organization that could easily be done by anybody but the only people that they would look at are*

*the uniform members. And as an organization, if you're a uniform member it's a great organization with plenty of opportunity. If you're a civilian employee the opportunities are far more limited. So that is an aspect that I don't like about doing this work. Oh ok, now with that said, the management creates a certain amount of negative atmosphere in my mind. The focus on rules, that don't seem to matter is what kills that. You know, the most important thing that I can do during my 12 hours of work is wear the right clothes and not eat certain foods at my desk. The work that I do isn't nearly as important as those things... (Participant 8)*

Participants felt like they were overlooked or forgotten by their superiors while at the same time knowing they played a vital role in the operation of the organization. They talked about the potential benefits of learning about each other's roles within the organization.

*I just think sometimes you look like at the officers and what they get and they get block training and they go to block training and do things like that. I think sometimes the officers deal with a lot more than we deal with, absolutely. So I'm not saying that we should get as much as they get, but I think it would be helpful for us to have like maybe a one day thing where you go out, like sometimes just getting out of the office and learn something, makes all the difference and having someone talk about stress or how you can cope, or like different coping mechanisms. Like sometimes just the easiest things that some people just don't think about, like going for a walk or deep breathing or things like that, that we don't talk about or think about. (Participant 10)*

Participants described the challenges of prioritizing calls for responders who were not aware of the relative importance of their emergency.

*From a dispatching perspective of it, it's stressful when the officers don't listen to each other. If I send somebody to a domestic where there are weapons, and the next guy is doing a traffic stop, that's a good one to let go because if you were going to a domestic you might want it to be quiet. Not that they're anywhere close to have to be responding but you just want the radio waves to be open, because only one person can talk at a time. (Participant 1)*

Another challenge identified by participants concerned the turnover among administrative staff through the communication centre which contributed to added overtime and changing office procedures.

*They don't get fixed and they never know how long that most officers been in here, how long will they be 'til they get promoted, maybe a year you know? So what interest do they have in actually making it better? They're like a president in their seventh year, they're frickin' useless/ They can't do anything to affect good change, they have no...there's no continuity in the fact that they're going to stay. If you had somebody in here that had done the job for 20 years managing things that was going to be here for another 10 before they retire. (Participant 1)*

Participants described efforts that could be taken by the organization to assist with the management of organization-related challenges and to increase training, facilitate support for stress and promote mental health.

*I think here one of the things that they could work on a bit more on this, obviously breaks, but at the same time then do a little bit more proactive, your back health, shift work diets, do seminars, speeches, things that you can get...give everyone learning opportunities. (Participant 5)*

Similarly, participants identified that the counselling available to communication workers was not a good fit for their unique situation. Employee Assistance Program counselors did not have the experience of their work and work environment, and the PART team, because it was in their own organization did not offer the safety of an external professional.

*There's EAP I think when you leave if you want therapy or whatever. You know you're talking to a trained therapist and that's super I'm sure, but they still haven't done the job so they're gonna say oh I see, I understand. No you don't! You really don't! So you know sorry until you've actually talked somebody off the ledge... (Participant 1)*

## **Personal Observations and Reflections**



I have always had a vested interest in the topic of coping. The stresses of life are something that I thought connected all humans, and the way in which we cope said a lot about we approach life. Initially, the idea of conducting research at the communication centre had not crossed my mind. I have had a variety of people in my life who had differing careers within law enforcement so it was something I was familiar with. However, this research came about through many discussions over the years with someone I knew through friends and family connections. She had been an employee for several years and sometimes gave me bits and pieces of information regarding the types of call she has had. She usually breezed through the room, while I was visiting with other people at gatherings, ate quickly and hurried to bed, in order to wake again in several hours for her next shift. I never knew when I'd see her next because her rotation scheduled seemed quite confusing.

During our discussions, in most ways she seemed to allow stories (what I perceived as the most horrifying stories) to just roll off her back. I was intrigued by how a person could be so indifferent with such tragic information. I had assumed, from my previous education in coping, that there must a very intricate network of supports and resources for her provided by the organization to combat stress. I soon learned, that in fact there was much less than I had anticipated, and the more I questioned, the more I was intrigued by how the communication centre operated and how the employees there functioned within it. I think this thirst for understanding was initially fuelled by these discussions, but as I began to learn more, my curiosity increased and so did my concern which inevitably led me to pursuing the process of writing a thesis.

**Communication centre operation.** The communication centre received over half a million calls per year (which is about an average of 685 calls per 12-hour shift), including both emergency and admin calls. The centre was confined to its own separate, yet secure and video surveyed, building in an industrial area within the city in which it was located. Upon my first visit to the communication centre, I would not have known what it was. The building was unmarked. Within the centre there were a variety of large and small rooms, but the largest by far was the call taking and dispatching floor. This area was located centrally within the building, was bright and had an open concept.

The call taker side was comprised of several workstations, perhaps 15 or so, which faced each other in groups of three or four. These workstations included an adjustable chair with a relatively high back, a computer console with three monitors, in addition to a telephone and a fan. The desk height and angle was controlled by push buttons that allowed the worker to complete tasks either sitting or standing throughout the duration of the shift. Each worker had their own headset, which they removed from their personalized mailbox upon arrival and plugged into the telephone of their assigned workstation through a very long cord. The call taking side also had a large lit up electronic board that let individuals know if there were calls waiting in sequence. When there were calls waiting, the board beeped until someone answered it. In addition, the call taking side housed the Sergeant offices, as well as the workstation of the CO3 (or civilian supervisor). Although the floor was very open, there were also a series of cut-outs on the exterior of the call taking area that allowed the call takers to see through to communicate visually with dispatchers across the room.

On the dispatcher side there were a series of workstations (10 or 11) which were often called consoles. They were similar to the ones in call taking in the sense that they faced each other, but they were organized in a way that created rows rather than a random pattern as they were in call taking. Each console represented a county within the service area the communication centre covered. One console housed more than one detachment within that area and the general service area for the communication centre covered both main highways and rural country roads, so the coverage area per console was quite large. Every console came equipped with an adjustable chair, and adjustable table as they do in call taking, however, this computer was comprised of four monitors, a radio to the officers equipped with speakers, a telephone, a fan, and a foot pedal for communication over the radio. Dispatchers also used their own headset, which they plugged in upon arrival. Dispatching consoles also had a folder that was specific to each console which contained maps for that particular area, in addition to important numbers, procedure information and cheat sheets.

When the workers arrived at work they were assigned their seat for that shift. Most workers rotated back and forth between call taking and dispatch with each shift, but some were on accommodations which allowed them to work only one of the two. Most individuals worked 12-hour shifts from 7 to 7, which was considered regular full-time. There were others who worked 9-hour shifts from 7 to 2 and were considered regular part-time. There were also additional workers who were considered “unclassified”, which meant that they were essential contract workers who do not have the benefits of being a long-term employee. There was no seniority for unclassified workers and the only way to become classified is if a position opened up and they won a competition for the position.

Shift rotation followed a 5, 5, 4 schedule meaning that workers work days for 5 days, then nights for 5 nights and then off for 4 days. For a regular full-time employee, their work schedule reflects a 12-week rotation. During the first 6 weeks of this rotation the employees work 19 12-hour shifts and 3 8-hour shifts (for a total of 228 hours). During the remaining 6 weeks of this rotation the employees work 17 12-hour shifts and 3 8-hour shifts (for a total of 252 hours). Therefore during a 12-week rotation a communication worker will have completed 480 hours of work, which is comparable to the amount of hours worked by the majority of society at a 9-5, 40 hour per week type jobs (also a total of 480 hours in 12 weeks).

During a shift, calls came into the centre through the call takers. There was a beep in their ear and then the line became active. It is their job to ask a series of questions to gather the pertinent information about the individual's emergency and then type this information into the computer system in a logical sequence. As the call taker is typing the information, she or he had the ability to send either small pieces of information or the entire call across the room to the corresponding dispatcher's desk. When this information arrived on the dispatcher's screen it was colour coded based on the type of call and also its priority. It is then the responsibility of the dispatcher to prioritize calls and assign details to the officers over the radio. Both the call taker and dispatcher had virtual maps on their computer so the call taker could see where the call was coming from, and the dispatcher had a map that showed where all of their police officers were located. All calls and radio transmission were recorded so call takers or dispatchers could play them back for information. Officers worked 6 to 6 shifts and when they arrived, dispatchers logged their cars into the system so they could assign incidents to each officer. Officers spoke to

dispatchers to find information for them, look for identification in the system, run license plates or call for additional services. When an incident was resolved, the officer directed the dispatcher to close the incident in the system.

The other rooms that existed within the communication centre included a lunch room, wellness room, boardroom, bathroom and front administrative staff offices. The lunch room was equipped with a full kitchen and appliances, as well as several eating tables and a patio area outdoors. The wellness room had a couple very comfortable chairs and a couch, as well as flat screen TV set and Wii gaming system. The boardroom looked like typical board room with teleconference equipment but there was also a flat screen TV mounted on the wall and exercise equipment including a rowing machine, free weights, floor mats and a bow flex. There were men's and women's bathrooms which included locker bays and showers.

**Organizational recruitment process.** The educational requirement to become a communication worker was the receipt of a high school diploma. Some individuals had studied telecommunications in college and some had degrees in other areas as well. The organization was primarily looking for individuals with transferable skills and resume and an interview screen are conducted. They completed a multi-tasking test as well as series of other tests to assess skills like typing. There was a 60% failure rate in this process and about 1 in 3 continued on to the next stage. All new recruits started with call taking training first, which included a week of listening in on calls, three weeks in classroom training at the General Headquarters on how to collect the correct information that are in line with policies and procedures, and 144 hours of call taking back in their centre with a trainer present. There was a process of graduated guidance by the trainer as

they initially sat at the desk with the individual and eventually sat at the desk next to them to jump in when they were needed. After about 6 months of call taking on their own, a new recruit began the exact same process for learning dispatch.

**Participant recruitment.** Upon my arrival at the communication centre, I met with some of the staff in administration to obtain some additional information about the communication centre and to receive a tour of the facilities. Previous to this tour, I had no concept of what the centre would look like or how the centre ran operationally. I provided the Staff Sergeant with a copy of my recruitment poster to send to all staff through a mass email.

Shortly after, I was contacted via telephone and email by various interested participants. As I scheduled opportunities to meet with workers, I also planned time to spend in the communication centre. Interviews were conducted on site in a discrete room, at a time convenient for the workers. With my presence in the centre, I soon had different individuals approaching me to ask about my study and to convey their interest in setting up an interview time. During these discussions and the interview process I assured participants that all information they discussed with me would maintain anonymous and confidential. When conducting interviews with clients, I provided workers a copy of informed consent form, explained its contents and elaborated on the purpose of the research. I also assured participants that they could obtain a copy of the thesis if they felt they were worried about what information would be included about them. I conveyed my concern for the well being of the communication workers there and my passion for creating positive change and support for them. I believe it was this discussion that helped to establish a rapport with the participants as they understood that I was there with an

interest in helping them and that my research would convey the needs of these individuals to the organization. I also took some time at the end of each interview to discuss options for supports and resources should they need any. I provided them with a list of contacts and encouraged them to contact me again if they had any further concerns or questions related to the study. The response I received from the participants was outstanding, as many volunteered to speak with me back on the floor, some offered resources and information about available supports, operations and the organization and others offered to have me plug into their workstation so I could listen to their calls and observe the way they work. I am very appreciative of the welcome that I had received.

**Adapting to shift rotation.** I often met with participants at very strange hours at the communication centre. This was a result of catching individuals at the beginning or end of their shift. Some were willing to meet during the day on their days off, others had their break in the middle of the night and were willing to conduct an interview then when it was slow. As a result, my presence within the communication centre took place at all times of the day.

Over the course of a 2 or 3 weeks, I spent a total of about 42 hours in the centre. I attempted to pick a variety of times of the day and week to try to get a sense of the differing workload volumes that take place. In addition, I attempted to see at least every platoon once, so I could get a sense of any differences between platoons. I also plugged into several workstations, both in dispatch and call taking during my time there. I myself, found it difficult to sit through an entire 12-hour shift. I believe the closest I got to a full shift was 9 hours, but I ate my lunch there as they did and sat through call after call taking notes.

Many had expressed to me that they thought I should work in the centre, since I was one of the few people who came in and spent that much time getting to know everyone and everything. I politely disagreed, as I personally, experienced a lot of anxiety listening to the calls. Some were worse than others but I was amazed that these individuals do this job on a daily basis. I soon learned more about the ins and outs of dispatch, but the thought of doing so many things at once also scared me because I had difficulty keeping up with the dispatchers when they were really busy. The biggest problem I found, was the shift work. Although I was not working rotating shifts the way the workers did, I was having difficulty sleeping during the day and being up at night. I started to become confused on what day it was or when I was supposed to eat. My body definitely felt the effects because I often felt like my mind was playing tricks on me. For example, I'd finish a 6-hour night at the centre on a weekend and then drive home at 5am and the birds were chirping. I felt very confused about how it was daylight and yet I felt so exhausted. My personal experience within the communication centre provided me with a massive amount of respect for the work these individuals do day in day out.

**Communication worker culture.** In order to collect ethnographic information, I observed a variety of interactions within the centre. There was a distinctive culture that existed within the walls of the communication centre, and although some platoons had a slightly different culture than others, there were number of cultural aspects that made up the culture. Aspects of this culture included rituals, language, expectations, connection and atmosphere.

The most obvious ritual that takes place during every shift was the filling out of the Tim Horton's order form. There was a sheet and bucket of money that were passed



around at the beginning of every shift, and then again about half way through. Someone was chosen to take the order to Tim Horton's and return with the orders and change. Other rituals that take place were established by each platoon to create morale. For example, some platoons organized charity events, like hot dog day which allowed eating at their desks.

There was also a variety of language used within the communication centre. Most of the language was derived from the language officers used but being a government based organization, there were also a lot of acronyms. When call takers and dispatchers communicated with one another they used short forms for the types of incidents that occurred (e.g. intox is a person who is intoxicated, or an MVC is a motor vehicle collision). In addition, dispatchers communicated with officers through the use of 10 codes (e.g. 10-4 means alright, 10-3 means silence on the air, or 20 means location). There were expectations placed on one another within the centre. For example, if someone needed assistance within a call or situation, another is expected to step in and help if she or he was not busy. When working in call taking, one was expected to stay in and help if the board is beeping, even if she or he needed a break. In addition, call takers were expected to make sure they obtained all the appropriate information so that the dispatcher could do her or his job. In addition, there were expectations about arriving for shift 15 minutes prior to the start of their shift and trying to leave your work in a place that is tied up so the person coming in can manage it at the beginning of shift. In addition, there was an expectation about being punctual on your lunch so as to keep lunches on schedule.

There was also a level of connection that existed among communication workers. Some go out of their way to bring in baked goods for everyone on their shifts, or to organize group buffet nights. Some organized group sports or group fitness outside on days off. The unique shift work rotation allowed for more connections as workers were often together for holidays or in the middle of night. During down time, individuals catch up, joke around, laugh, help each other with homework, research/share information online, play cards or trivia games, generally doing things to keep each other occupied. As a result, they viewed one another as family and they established support and lifelong relationships. Since these individuals spent so much time with each other, they tended to make each other their primary relationships and create intimate relationship between one another or with those who are officers. These connections also became strong through their shared experience of the job and the types of issues that they dealt with. The understanding of these experiences and sharing in this emotion created an atmosphere of energy in the moment that one could feel on the floor during times of extreme stress, activity or sadness. Although I have not personally witnessed or experienced an extreme event such an officer death or shooting, many have told me that everyone felt the experience and could feel that energy in the air. I can speak to my own experience with this environmental energy though. Typically the middle of the night it is quiet but on weekends when people are leaving local bars to return home, the floor erupts with calls, noise and action. I noticed a definite difference in the tension when the room goes from quiet, and slow in the middle of the night, to busy and loud in those early morning hours. I truly feel honoured to have been a fly on the wall within this unique environment and to be given an inside look into the culture of communication workers.

## Summary

From the content analysis of transcribed interviews with participants seven themes emerged. The themes included Meaning-Focused Coping, Emotion-Focused Coping, Problem-Focused Coping, Reappraisal, Comm Centre Culture, Occupational Dimensions and Organizational Structure that together described the common experiences of coping among participants including both individual and collective aspects.

To promote trustworthiness in the research and consistent with an ethnographic approach, personal observations and reflections were offered to include details of the context and the researcher's experiences of the context that influenced her questioning and analysis of participants' experiences. These personal reflections described the process from beginning to end of data collection including communication centre operation, organizational recruitment process, participant recruitment for the study, adapting to shift rotation and communication worker culture. The researcher's personal experience within the communication centre and journaling allowed an avenue to reflect on novel and learned information to those who have never experienced life within an emergency communication centre. In addition, the immersion within the communication centre, listening to the call taking/dispatching tasks, interacting with workers and experiencing rotating shifts provided personal experiences for reflection that provided context for understanding the culture of these communication workers.

The ethnographic nature of data allowed for a combination of emerging themes as well as personal reflections. Together these aspects provided a unique framework for understanding the coping experiences of communication workers in regards to workplace stress, level of functioning and role of communication centre culture. With use of this

contextual framework for understanding communication worker's coping experiences, comparisons can be made between the participants' experiences of coping and the literature.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

Themes that emerged from ten semi-structured interviews about the experience of coping as a communication worker were largely consistent with the literature. Meaning-focused coping referred to strategies that involved finding meaning in a stressor for personal growth or related to the job. Emotion-focused coping referred to emotion-management. Problem-focused coping referred to changing circumstances. Reappraisal referred to changing perception of a situation. Comm Centre Culture referred to the ways that workers interacted within the work environment. Occupational dimensions referred to managing particular work-related characteristics. The organizational structure referred to coping within the broader organization.

Problem-focused, meaning-focused and emotion-focused coping have been well described in the literature. Reappraisal has been associated with meaning-focused coping. Although there was little attention to the coping experiences of communication workers, Comm Centre Culture identified collective ways that participants coped by relying on their connections to one another while Occupational Dimensions and Organizational Structure described some of the specific issues the participants experienced. In this chapter the literature is compared and contrasted with the experiences described by participants. Similarities between the existing literature and participants' experiences are presented before the differences.

### **Similarities to the Literature**

There were several consistencies between the literature and experiences of participants in the present study. These similarities include experiences of workplace stress, coping and burnout, as well as characteristics of the work of communications

workers including shift-work, secondary trauma, nonverbal cues, emotional labour and low control.

**Workplace stress.** The physiological, psychological and behavioural experiences associated with stress identified in the literature (e.g. LaMonatgue, Keegel, Louie, & Ostry, 2010) were present among participants. Participants' experiences included physiological problems such as cardiac health challenges, psychological effects such as anxiety and depression, as well as behavioural issues such as alcohol use or over-eating were described. Additionally, occupational models of workplace stress including the Demand-Control model (DCM; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), Effort Reward Imbalance (ERI; Siegrist, 1996) model and organizational justice model (Kivimaki, et al, 2003) resonated with the experiences of participants. For example, within the Demand-Control model workers experience "job strain" if they possess low levels of control against high levels of demand. Participants characterized their experience in this way. Furthermore, participants described stressful experiences resulting from low levels of support from the organization or coworkers, which in conjunction with low control and high demand contributed to "iso-strain" (Johnson & Hall, 1988). In Effort Reward imbalance, high effort and low reward (Siegrist, 1996) led to high stress. Participants, consistent with the literature, identified financial, job stability and ability to advance in one's career as rewards (LaMontagne, Keegal, Louie, & Ostry, 2010), while the consistency of power of that experience was fluid. While they could, for example, identify rewards and benefits, their was tested frequently in response to the kinds of issues that came up in their work life, home life and life of the organization. The organizational justice model described relational justice as perceived fairness and respect by supervisors or management

(Kivimaki, et al., 2003). Again, participants experienced these features. A conclusion that may be drawn from the data in the present study suggests that these models are helpful ways to organize concepts associated with workplace stress that apply to this particular group of participants. In addition, they may potentially offer a more complete understanding of workplace stress in combination as opposed to isolation.

**Burnout.** Burnout has been defined as an affective reaction and response to ongoing stress that results in the deterioration or depletion of emotional and cognitive resources (Shirom, 2003). For example, those with burnout could experience, “physical illness, sleep disturbances, work/family conflict and substance use” (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010, p.487). Participants in the study did identify features of stress-related outcomes they had been carrying for some time such as increased susceptibility and frequency of colds, flu, as well as weight gain/loss, sleep issues and flare ups of pre-existing medication conditions like irritable bowel syndrome. Attitude and relationship indicators (SECASA, 2009) such as cynicism, anger at clients, emotional distance from clients as well as isolation from staff to preserve time and energy were identified. As identified in the literature (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010) participants also noted the presence of job turnover, absenteeism and lateness.

**Coping.** There was consistency between the experiences of participants and the problem-focused, meaning-focused and emotion-focused approaches to coping that have been identified in the literature (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). The findings from literature reinforced the importance of individual’s perception of a particular experience that contributed a great deal to the type and intensity of stress and coping measures needed. Themes from the present study identified features of coping in addition to the

personal, including interpersonal and organizational aspects. Consistent with the literature on workplace environment (Mackay, et al., 2004) participants noted that interventions designed to help workers enhance their own self-efficacy, collectively and through organizational responsiveness, would be very useful.

**Stress, Coping and Burnout.** Previous studies have explored how coping with workplace stress prevented burnout through active and avoidant coping (Sasaki, Kitaoka-Higashiguchi, Morikawa, & Nakagawa, 2009) which was reflected in the findings of the present study. In addition, research on stressors and coping strategies among other emergency responders found similarly to the participants in the present study that the concepts of hypervigilance and emotional labour could be placed in either category (Gilmartin, 2002; Shuler & Davenport-Sypher, 2000). That is, depending on the context, hypervigilance and emotional labour could function as either a stressor or a coping strategy. In addition, participants described the mutual support they provided and received as well as organizational features that have been identified in the literature as those which would be helpful to them.

Emotional labor is being paid for doing emotional work. The emotional work associated with the communications role of participants is to maintain a calm demeanour and rational processing through a highly emotional crisis situation for the caller on the other end of the line, and to maintain a clear and logical process throughout their dealings with the individual, the dispatcher and possibly an officer as well. There may be great difference between how a communication worker presents to others and how she or he is actually feeling during the crisis situation and follow up. Such inconsistency is very important for the work role, but in personal relationships it could be problematic (Kovacs,



Kovacs & Hegedus, 2010). Moving between the states is not easily or automatically achieved. Participants were able at times to distance themselves from callers, compartmentalize or use cognitive schemas to reframe their role found it easier to separate emotionally on the job. Those who found situations reminded them of their own personal experiences had more difficulty separating from call content experienced more stress.

Hypervigilance was necessary for survival on the job but detrimental to one's personal life. Research on law enforcement professionals revealed the asset of hypervigilance throughout trauma exposure in order to maintain personal physical safety and effectiveness (Gilmartin, 2002). Over a long period of time however they began to experience more consistent high levels of vigilance and staying in these heightened states of awareness throughout an entire shift. Although communication workers did not experience the personal safety risks that officers did, a similarly high level of vigilance was required to be alert to simultaneous multiple stimuli. Participants described a similar experience of difficulty switching between calls about major crises and those that were just for information. After a shift with multiple major crisis calls they had difficulty slowing down to an appropriate mental and emotional state. This led to fatigue for officers in previous research and communication workers in the present study.

**Organizational initiatives.** The coping literature included references to preventive efforts made via the employing organization to promote wellness among staff (Dollard & Winefield, 2002 as cited by Caulfield, Chang, Dollard, & Elshaug, 2004; Kendall et al., 2000, as cited by Caulfield, et al. 2004). Some of these efforts were delivered directly by the organization to staff, staff to staff or staff to organization (De

Jonge & Dollard, as cited in Caufield et al. 2004), and focussed on change individuals make for themselves, change the individuals make collectively and change the organization makes.

While it is evident that organizations can take on a role to help minimize stress by implementing programs to increase morale and make operational changes there are features of the job that are necessary for staff to adapt to (Reference for Business, 2012). Communication workers talked about the benefits of predictability in an unpredictable role. While they were not able to determine which calls would be challenging, when they would come, how often and how intense, they did appreciate control over relatively small parts of their work such as peer debriefing. In addition they suggested adding different forms of breaks during shift and staff workshops on health-related topics. Perhaps the most powerful preventive efforts against burnout or wellness promotion were identified within the culture of the staff in the centre. The teamwork, accountability to each other, as well as spending time together including holidays bonded participants together. Participants saw the connections and dependency staff shared with one another in very positive terms and would therefore be very important for the organization to support.

**Workplace characteristics of communication workers.** Characteristics of the work for communication workers included shift-work, secondary trauma exposure, lack of nonverbal cues, emotional labour and lack of control. For each feature identified in the literature participants made reference to challenges associated with it as well as ways of coping.

***Shift-work.*** Participants described sleep-related challenges that had been identified in the literature (e.g. Moorcroft, 2003). While there were additional issues of

self-care and availability for daytime events participants described the flexibility of their work as a way to reframe and benefit from the associated challenges.

***Secondary trauma.*** Communication workers were regularly exposed to traumatic events as a result of learning about trauma experienced by callers. Participants had experienced effects of exposure to trauma, both individually through the calls they took and as a collective such as when one incident (e.g. the loss of an officer) was felt and experienced by the group. Consistent with the literature on coping participants benefitted a great deal from the support of their coworkers at those times (Regehr, Hemsworth, Leslie, Howe, & Chau, 2004) as well as utilizing other individual strategies such as problem-solving or reinterpretation (Sasaki, Kitaoka-Higashiguchi, Morikawa, & Nakagawa, 2009) to manage.

***Lack of nonverbal cues.*** Participants experienced anxiety when taking calls but did not identify lack of nonverbal cues as problematic. The anxiety was more generalized to a lack of control over the situation. They coped with this by creating control, consistent with the literature, (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), through organizing workstations and computer screens. Additionally they spoke of time management and prioritization.

***Emotional labour.*** The concept of emotional labour referred to the job requirement to display particular emotions (Hochschild, as cited in Opengart, 2005). The stress associated with emotional labour became more significant for participants when they were unable to separate personal from work-related distress. Making a firm distinction between work and home was very helpful in the literature (Kovacs, Kovacs & Hegedus, 2010) and for participants as a way to cope with the demanding nature of emotional labour they experienced.

**Low control.** Participants described a lack of control in relation to workload, seating, breaks and organizational policies. However they did find ways to create control through sense of teamwork and community with their coworkers that gave increased sense of predictability over the work (Bond & Bunce, 2001).

### **Differences from the Literature**

The results yielded a few differences from the literature. Primarily these differences are as a result of the sparse literature specifically associated with communication workers. These differences include lack of closure, emotional labour and stress cycles throughout a shift.

**Lack of closure.** Lack of closure was identified by participants who noted that through obtaining the desired information, they would cope better. Participants identified that having closure of calls or situations would contribute to personal control of stress or associated feelings. Although they had the option of requesting permission to read closed police reports they felt “silly” asking for it or admitting to management that they needed to do it. Information regarding the importance of closure reflects literature reviewing the effects on witnesses (responders/victims) of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, focusing on ways to conduct effective critical incident debriefings after traumatic events (Davis, 2004). The need for closure was viewed as one of seven imperative steps within debriefing used to facilitate the grieving and healing process. However, the importance of closure as it relates to trauma and debriefing has not yet been researched within the communication worker population and the importance of this role seems to have been minimized based on the feedback provided by participants of this study.

**Emotional labour.** The results of this study suggested that the relationship between stress and coping was much more complex than the recognition and management of emotional labour through individual coping. In addition, communication workers in the present study described their emotional labour as a challenge while emotional labour has been characterized in other communication worker related research as a positive experience (Shuler, & Davenport Sypher, 2000).

**Stress cycles.** Participants identified the challenge of cycling through several high and low stress points within a single shift. It was characterized as a “rollercoaster” ride that was emotionally and physically draining. Physiologically, the high stress promoted alertness, hearing, reaction time as well as elevated heart rate (Gilmartin, 2002). While the effects of this chronic hypervigilance have been studied in the law enforcement population, little is presently known about the effects of cycling within this population or within communication workers, and whether there are different forms of coping that should be used within a shift, at the end or later on.

## **Conclusion**

The experiences of participants and the issues identified in the literature overlapped a great deal and therefore contribute evidence of applicability of findings about coping among other high stress and emergency responder populations to the experiences of communication workers. Participants in the present study described multiple strategies they used to cope including finding meaning in their job through self-satisfaction or financial satisfaction and finding their own supports when they were not available. They found ways to understand or handle emotions related to the job by engaging in self-care routines, maintaining connections with loved ones, venting as well

as distancing or compartmentalizing. They chose conceptualization by either placing more focus on their personal life, using positivity or being thankful for their position.

While there were many very positive coping strategies others were more problematic. Those who relied heavily on physical activity, humour, spirituality or found enjoyment because of freedom or the challenge of their work seemed to cope better overall. Tactics of avoidance, isolation, intolerance or increased frustrations and anxiety were less content overall. Similarly, more troubled coping was connected to lower relationship stability, less self-care, views of supports available as inappropriate, a negative view of the organization and feeling helpless. Overall, coping in particular ways appeared to align with participants' wellness.

While there were similarities across participants' experiences of coping, there was variety between the specific forms and timing. While we learned which forms of coping were used and what forms seemed to be most employed by those doing well, the form of delivery, who delivered it and when were beyond the scope of the study.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have implications for helping professionals who provide support and intervention to communication workers and other emergency responders as well as for future research.

**Helping professionals.** When counsellors are aware of the unique aspects of the workplace for their clients they will be able to find better supports and perhaps do so in less time. It is beneficial for counselling professionals to understand the way communication workers conceptualize coping as a means to an end. For example, the use

of problem-focused, meaning-focused and emotional-focused coping informs the counsellor about how a client makes sense of her or his world in order to cope.

Results of the present study also provide counselling professionals with a greater understanding of the relationship between trauma and hypervigilance that exists within this profession. The understanding of this relationship will also help counsellors in understanding how that experience on the job can contribute to challenges with social functioning, sleep and other stress-related problems. It is also important for counselling professionals to know how important their coworkers are in their emotional and social lives. As clearly indicated by participants in the present study, coworkers support is an essential source of strength.

In addition, information that counselling professionals have about the work realities of communication workers could be beneficial to counselling other emergency responders with whom they share some job characteristics. When counsellors understand the reality of their clients' experiences, they will be able to provide supports tailored to the individual's style of coping, increase their effectiveness within their job and in turn provide emergency responders with better service, allowing the public to also gain better service from emergency responders.

**Research.** In future studies, the inclusion of quantitative data would be useful, especially when focusing on one or more specific aspects of these results. Similarly, it would be beneficial to conduct intervention studies that explore aspects of increased sense of control or morale. In addition, it would be beneficial to understand the role of educational and training supports as interventions or even the role of more debriefing

support. Organizational interventions could also be explored including incentive programs for workers to incorporate more self-care routines or to eat healthier.

Any of this information could be used to help to create effective interventions for other emergency responders such as police, fire and ambulance workers. As a result, it would be beneficial to gather additional information regarding whether the role of retention and reduced sick time in communication workers have an impact on the stress of other emergency responders or the impact communication worker have on the effectiveness and service emergency responders provide to the general public.

### **Limitations**

The sampling method used in the methodology of this study may have created limitations on the experiences that were captured through participant interviews. The sample employed was a convenience sample based on the engagement with this particular communication centre. As the volunteers came forward on their own accord there is no way of gauging if these volunteers showed higher levels of initiative in comparison to others.

Similarly, it is difficult to predict if all the information disclosed during interviews provides a rich enough picture of the experiences of communications personnel. Although the interviews were thick with rich description of the experiences of 10 of these workers, and providing a broad diversity of coping experience and personal information, it would be impossible to state that all coping strategies, or opinions were captured within this study but does provide a starting point for continued research in this area.



Finally, as the data for this study were extremely rich and the methodology allowed for a thorough overview of the major themes, it was difficult to capture the full scope of the experiences and apply them in a strategic way. The use of this methodology allowed for broad comparisons to similarities and differences within the literature, but it did not provide comparison between each interview. Using a research method, such a case-study method would have allowed for a more detailed analysis of each individual interview, with an analysis that allowed for comparison. However, as there has been very little literature on this population in the past, there was a significant need for rich data to establish future directions for research that may indeed include a case-study analysis.

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**Appendix A: Poster Advertisement**

**Call Takers/ Dispatchers Experiences with Occupational Stress**

Are you a 911 Communication Worker with at least one year of experience on the telephone lines?

I am doing a research study on the experiences of Occupational Stress in 911 Call Taker/ Dispatcher.

I would like to conduct interviews on location at \_\_\_\_\_

If you are interested please email or call me (Sarah Horsford) at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ -  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent Form**

### *Coping: The Experiences of 911 Communication Workers*

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

##### **Introduction**

My name is Sarah Horsford and I am a first year Master of Education in Counselling Psychology student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the experiences of occupational stress in 911 Communication Workers and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

##### **Purpose of the study**

The aims of this study are to identify the beneficial and challenging experiences associated with workplace stress.

##### **If you agree to participate**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to answer questions in an interview format regarding your experiences as a 911 Communication Worker and the impact of stress on your work, daily functioning and personal life. This interview will take about 45 to 60min in length and will be Audio-Recorded.

##### **Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. The outcome of your interview will not be discussed with any of your co-workers or superiors.

##### **Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

##### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, refuse the use of audio recording or withdraw from the study at any time. These actions will in no way affect your employment status.

##### **Questions**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Sarah Horsford at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ or Jason Brown at \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sarah Horsford

*Coping: The Experiences of 911 Communication Workers*

*Sarah Horsford and Jason Brown*

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide**

### ***Demographics***

- 1) Sex:
- 2) Age:
- 3) Years of Service:
- 4) Highest Level of Education:
- 5) Course of Education (History):

### ***Job Satisfaction***

- 6) What lead you to a pursuing a job in this field (how did you find out about it)?
- 7) Have you had other jobs in the past? How does this job compare?
- 8) How do you make meaning of your job for yourself?
- 9) What do you dislike about the type of work that you do?
- 10) How do you cope with these dislikes and/or changes?

### ***Functioning and Health***

- 11) In your past, can you identify any particular situations/instances in your life that have been particularly stressful for you?
- 12) Are there any circumstances in your personal life that you have noticed make it more difficult for you to perform at work?

### ***Coping with Stress***

- 13) Please describe a typical day of work for you?
- 14) What emotions do you feel in a typical day at your job?

- 15) What has been your experience with stress during your time in this position, and how did you manage this stress?
- 16) Are there particular sorts of calls that you notice tend to produce a more stressful reaction for you? Which do you find enjoyable?
- 17) When you have experienced a particularly stressful call, is there anything you do in the moment or before the end of your shift to cope?
- 18) How do you recognize when stress is becoming an issue for you? How do you deal with this?

***Work Environment/Collective Coping***

- 19) Can you describe your work environment or atmosphere?
- 20) How would you describe the relationship you have with your fellow employees?
- 21) What role(s) do your fellow employees play in your work day?

***Employer Support***

- 22) What services are available to you if you need support during/immediately after a shift, and what resources are available for long term support?
- 23) Is there something that you believe your employer could be doing to facilitate support?
- 24) Is there anything else that you would like to add?

***Probes:***

- Can you explain that in more detail?
- Could you provide an example?
- What do you mean by that?
- Can you clarify that?

## Appendix D: Meaning Units by Code

The following are direct quotes by participants organized by code:

### Accountability

*I've had other jobs where you go and you're kinda not as good as you normally are, you kinda scrape by and nobody's life is in jeopardy but here you could, if you're not on your game, somebody can really pay for that.*

*We're always short staffed so if I leave in the middle of a shift because I have an emergency at home, that really has an implication on my coworkers. It's not well we do less whatever today...no we get the same number of calls and we have fewer people to handle it now. This is an issue right, that's stressful in a way. Yeah know don't come in if there's a chance you aren't going to finish the shift in my opinion because you're gonna leave everybody short. Whereas if things are a little bit dicey and maybe she's not, my partner's not gonna have a good day. Then I really need to be calling in sick ahead of time so they can, hopefully, replace me.*

*You have to be accountable to them is a big thing and I think that's important and I think that's the way that we all hopefully take it with some seriousness, but I mean even to the fact that if you make stupid calls that don't make sense how is the dispatcher going to do anything useful? So yeah were accountable to each other.*

*If you didn't feel any accountability to your floor and have some people could, but really you're gonna stay in, your gonna finish it out even if you might not be an All-Star for the rest your shift, but you're gonna stay and finish it out because like I said the same number of calls come in whether we have enough people to handle him or not.*

*Well, unfortunately on the one I'm going to be on there are just, a lot of people off on long term sick so we're short right from the start and that kind of thing. That's the most stressful thing is knowing that we're right from the gate open, we're going to short.*

*You're going to be a relied upon employee. If your not capable doing this anymore then we are going to retrain you, were going to give you opportunities, so now people are blatantly out violating policies, procedures, guidelines. They are actually being documented, people are being suspended. So in a weird way it's actually a morale booster as well.*

*There's anger when you hear what other people, co-workers say and respond to people and if your on call taking and they are being absolutely ignorant to people, right and I accept that this is a very stressful job and there is going to be days when you are not able to cope with it nearly as well as other days, however that does not give you permission to. There's a higher expectation in your behaviour if you choose to be here right, so I constantly keep it in check because I don't want to be the one... 'cause that could be your mom or somebody's dad.*



*You get angry at your co-workers and their disappointment and their lack of professionalism comes out sometimes so it's not only just your callers or the officers that are jerks. There are some, they're also high strung, they also have that, but I still hope for them to have higher expectation of behaviour. If you're not capable of doing this then do something about it.*

*There's the different tones and the different ways and that's got to be one the biggest frustrations is because I don't care if you have called me 150 times. I don't care. We have the common callers, and I am still going to treat you with respect and dignity.*

### **Alone**

*I kicked my family out and said I need a minute to deal with this like this.*

*I would love to go back to working with 4 or 5 people or even just 2 as long as you get a long with other person. Or even just on my own. There are some nights I come in here and I think...it might sound a little silly...but there are nights I come in here and I just don't feel like working with 25 people. I think I would love to be a truck driver tonight just so I can be on my own on the highway, and not anyone to talk to, just do my own thing.*

*I mean I know when things were at their worst and I was coming in here, I'm not going to lie, I eventually learned to keep my mouth shut. I think I was starting to alienate some people by talking about it. It was the big thing happening in my life at the time and I was scared shitless.*

*It's a very isolated job if you're busy because you're just working the console yourself or if you're in call taking, you're the only one talking to the people calling in. Your coworkers are talking to other people they're busy doing their own thing. It's really like even the police officers who go to a call 2 men to an alarm or 2 men to a domestic or you know like, it's not like that where you're like doing the team thing very often. Like you're doing a team thing if you're like I'm busy, can you call ambulance? But for the most part you're isolated at your console and you're doing it yourself.*

*But that's how I cope. Because I need to get away from everybody.*

### **Anxiety**

*I mean we have a great platoon right and that's one of the big stressors that's what I was telling you about the other night, is that the change in the platoon. And some of the people that I see on there I think, oh my goodness how am I ever gonna....?*

*If you're on a good platoon, it is. But if you're not...but I mean it's 2 years and you hope to heck that the next time you come back around you get back with a decent group but...*

*If I know which desk...yeah I think sometimes, I have the time if you know what desk but if on the other hand if it's a desk you don't want...there has been people in the past, I am not one of them but they will call in sick.*

*The only time it gets stressful is shift change, when you come in and you go to sit down and you know how the screens are split with the officers in the bottom and the calls at the top and then when you assign them they go drop onto the officer. Well if you walk in and the whole screen is lit up and there's a ton of crap in the top that hasn't even been dispatched yet, because they are so busy like a snow storm or something from the get go, you are at a higher anxiety level.*

*When you first answer the phone and someone is screaming on the other end of the line, and really upset...that just gets you right off, like you can feel the tension... Ok I need to calm this person down, I need to find out what's going, we need to get them help like right away. Right? So that definitely, (makes whoops sound) the stress level goes up.*

*When you're dispatching, and there's a pursuit, and you hear pursuit and you hear the sirens over the radio, that gets your stress like, ok we need to kick into high gear here and we need to make sure everything is going properly.*

*Obviously if the officer hits his emergency button, a lot of times it's false, they hit it by accident. Probably 9 times out of 10 they hit it by accident and it makes like a sound on the radio and that gets you like oh ok who was that?!*

*I'm going to have a really close friend on this platoon shuffle which is going to be great because in this job you really need that and I don't know why they're frickin' messing it up! Like seriously, we have enough stress in our job that we don't need... 'cause so and so gets along really well, somebody else like, like let's not, let's separate them.*

*Probably anxiety, in fact not probably, we do.*

*Anxiety, yes. That would be a good word for what I would feel in dispatch when the volume gets higher than what I can handle. Some days I'm better at it than others. If I have the attitude of I don't really care about whether I succeed or fail then I'm more efficient and I don't get the anxiety with it. If I allow myself to get worked up about things that aren't getting done, if yeah...there's a lot of anxiety that comes with that. I have to feel like I'm on my game to handle dispatch.*

*Then if it was really nasty and I was expecting it to be nasty again the next night, then I might feel a little bit apprehensive about coming back but I still do...*

*Yeah. I don't know, its just like there's so many rules like if you were to read all the emails that come out in a year you'd probably get 6 binders full of rules, plus all the normal standard operating procedures and policies like you just, you try your best to remember them all but every console has a different set of rules too for tow trucks or corn trucks or whatever and you move around from desk to desk and you're trying to*

*retain it all...It's information overload, so you're going to make mistakes somewhere down the line. And most people are fairly reasonable and decent you know, you just talk and work it out but there's a lot of instances, I think that comes from head office that wants to burn you for it.*

*When I first started, the first 6 months getting to know the area, I found that very stressful like trying to figure out the area, because there's so much of it and main streets, you know. There's like a hundred 12<sup>th</sup> concessions and what township and the way people say different things. I found that a little bit stressful. Like the mapping and trying to figure out where's where in all of Southwestern Ontario so that I found stressful.*

*You know I mean anxiety sometimes I think probably or waiting to find out like oh my god what happened or you know. Could I have done more, could I have done better, could I have gone faster? Like you know sometimes a little bit of doubt.*

### **Appreciation**

*Dispatch is satisfying when you have a really busy day and you handle it, yeah know you just do it and, you know sometimes officers call in and say you did a good job today.*

*There's not a lot of calls where everyone in the room is necessarily involved by even just from the call taker to the dispatcher to have a minute or two to say great job you know thanks for getting them there so quickly or whatever else you know.*

*Just a good job I don't need a trophy every time but you know just....*

*Just some recognition like gee that was really good. I got it at the console and they said it I don't know how many times on the radio but no one said it to my Sergeant.*

*My own personal challenge in the call taking side of it, when you have the enjoyable time where at the end of the call somebody says thank you very much. That to me is what is enjoyable or for whatever reason they are calling.*

*A positive letter saying [employee's name], you did a good job on this call, blah blah blah signed here, goes in your file.*

*Yeah, just making sure that people are getting the recognition when it's there.*

*I don't know if it's related or not but at the end of the day if you've had a busy shift and the officers give you positive feedback, you know what? You did a really good job today. You don't hear it a lot from this building but you get a lot of meaning from that too just knowing that ok they appreciate what you did.*

*Some of the most enjoyable things I think are just like when you have someone who's nice to you. Like in this job you get shit on a lot. Why aren't you here, where are you? You never do anything. This is a lot of negativity so it's nice when you have someone that*

*calls and is like I know you're really busy however I was hoping you could do this and thank you and those kind of things. So those kinds of calls I mean I don't think there's a lot of happy calls here, you know? I think it's more like being thankful and thanking you for your help and that kind of thing. I don't really think there's a lot of calls that we get that's like you get the odd call that's like thanks for doing what you do.*

*But I will say that over the years from when I first started to now there's a lot more like, in the last few years gotten tons of...just the other day I got one from my sergeant, they sent one saying you did a great job. Then I got another one from doing a tactic. I got a regional commander's letter a year ago for helping save someone's life. So I would say definitely more recognizing that kind of stuff has happened over the last few years. I think that it's nice, everyone likes to be recognized and "oh thanks, you think I did a good job" kind of thing.*

*I don't think you think about it every day or anything, certainly when you're in is a social situation and somebody says what do you do? You know people have a lot of respect for what we do, you know, so I think that's quite validating.*

*Yeah but we don't get that feedback, and that's what's part of the problem. We don't have any feedback, we don't get any feedback from officers, we don't get feedback from management, we don't get feedback from the callers that something's done well.*

### **Appropriateness of Supports**

*There's EAP I think when you leave if you want therapy or whatever. You know you're talking to a trained therapist and that's super I'm sure, but they still haven't done the job so they're gonna say oh I see, I understand. No you don't! You really don't! So you know sorry until you've actually talked somebody off the ledge...*

*Yeah, the PART team for the most part. But like I said, I've never actually utilized those services but it's good to know they're there. The other thing too is with my particular issue at home, as much as they may be trained, I don't think they would...maybe that's why I've never really taken advantage of it. They haven't really been there...you know what I'm saying about being there?*

*EAP is available, there's cards and brochures around. They aren't really long term though, they're pretty much short term....they're hard though because a lot of people don't use them here and the reason being that they don't get what we do. Whereas the PART members do, they do the same job. That frustration is job related, but you don't have to spend 4 sessions just trying to explain to them where you're coming from you're doing that, you don't even have to do that with us. Yeah know, you've got through all of those barriers and it's immediate. That makes a big difference. We don't have time, like we don't have time to go spend 5 sessions with somebody just to start getting some assistance, there's no time in our lives for that.*

*We've got peer support which we have the phone numbers on the wall in the bathroom, if you want to have privacy and go and sneak a phone call. Although I wouldn't really feel comfortable maybe with a peer because there might be something that I want to say that I feel like I can't. I would be afraid of the confidentiality thing like I know were sworn to it and that but it's still...*

*I wouldn't say really great. That was my initial...when I first recognized that things were going south way back, when it first started I called the EAP and I got...I wound up seeing a counsellor that I really really liked eventually. But the one that I was sent to initially, I don't know, it was too clinical. Oh we can't do this and I can only see you for so many sessions because that's all you're covered for, it's better than a kick in the derriere but at the same time, and then I started seeing another counsellor, a referral from a friend and it worked out better.*

*I think EAP is useful because that's removed from the workplace, but this PART thing even though they like stress it's confidential...it's still with people who work in this building. And if they go home and not only tell their husband, but their husband only tells his best friend like...*

*And you know we were able to like make appointments and schedule when it suited both of us. She didn't have a lot of availability but that was my priority at that time, that month was to get into see her once every 10 days so if I had to go, I had to go like that was my priority.*

*They have some PART team thing here that you can call. I don't know if anybody uses it, I personally wouldn't.*

### **Arousal/Hypervigilance**

*This job you have to, it's multitasking and even though you have a headset on and taking a call or you're on the radio, you're conditioned over many years and trained to not miss any anything in the room, or some of us are better at it than others but you know you're dealing with something in your ear, whether it's a phone call, somebody says something at the other end of the room, and you catch it and when you do that day in day out that's got to have some kind of impact on your health and I personally, that's a big part of it like I said I can't go to a restaurant and not let all this noise get to me.*

*In here we do in-service training, every few months, and once per year we do a pursuit exam. And not so much this last one, but the one before that, it really sent me for a...It was shocking because I was sitting there trying to do the exam. It was that thing again, because all my colleagues were in the room with me and they were being vocal and laughing and carrying on. Thank God I was getting the answers from them, as well, but I could not concentrate and that is something in the last two years seems to be getting worse. I could just not concentrate on the task at hand.*

*And I'll tell yeah, again this is part of the aging process as well, when I was young noise*

*never bothered me. Today if I go into a restaurant I want it quiet. Casey's is probably the worst place, I don't know if you've been there... Yeah, it's because of architecture of the building or whatever but the place is packed. It is noisy that I can't stand it, I can't stand that kind of environment. I can't stand all of it going by, that stuff has really affected me, I think a lot of it is because of this job, I do and also the stress of what I've been through.*

*If I'm the dispatcher who has to deal with an officer death what am I gonna do? Am I gonna croak? Am I gonna be able to handle it? Am I gonna break down? What am I gonna do? And all of those things you think about when you're not here and then you think about it when you're here. So you're spending 12 hours ramped up and sometimes 12 hours ramped up for absolutely nothing. And then you're back here within 12 hours, its not enough time to go down again.*

*Where I notice the stress is with things from work is when you know one ride on the lake, and other parents are lying down and their just kind of relaxing and the kids are playing at the water's edge and I'm the parent to take this and I can't relax. I can't ...I hate the beach because I don't ...it's not relaxing to me. I'll sit there and I'll watch and if I find a parent beside me isn't watching their kids, I'm watching mine and I'm watching theirs. So you don't ...it carries over.*

*It's like constantly, it's always on. It was so funny, [participant's partner] and I were walking in a restaurant and it's almost like we're jocking to see who will face the door and when we sit down it's ...even though I'm not a police officer anymore you have that, you're aware right.*

*I'm watching people afterwards and as they are kind of dealing with stuff and people are on the ground and they are crying, sobbing and doing this because it was horrifying to watch. To see this guy being dragged. It is completely different from going to a call, taking a call ..those yeah it just unfolded right in front of you. Completely different response. But talking to one of the other guys you know that was a witness standing beside me and his going like Oh my god, he's kind of doing this and at one point he goes how are you so calm?*

*So he and I are helping this other guy. Right and he's ..I said you know, its not fair but at the same time there's an odd feeling because I'm watching all of these other people get...and you can tell right away who were emergency personnel... You can tell and it's like a ...sometimes you want to be that person that doesn't have that on the whole time. Sometimes you just want to have that blissful ignorance.*

*I'm over protective and I'm like you get to hear and see the things I see on a regular basis. I mean someone attempted to abduct a child just...yeah know...like a county from where we live or like you don't hear that stuff. Everything is great for you which is great but that's if I want to keep my eye on my kids a little closer than...well then don't judge me. Well that's the way that I am and that's the way I'm going to be.*

*Dr. Gilmartin wrote a book and he talks about the Hypervigilance being up here all day and then you go home and you crash. Everything he talks about is true so my goal is not have, not allow myself to go up during the day at work as much as possible. So my goal is not to be in that hypervigilant state through the whole shift. Sometimes I'm very successful at that, other times not because you get busy with important things you have to kind of bring the thing up...and then dispatch you have to kind of be alert enough that when something changes on the screen that you pick it up right away so there's a certain amount of vigilance required for that.*

*Also like when I'm not at work and if I'm stressed from work or at work or at home I find that my ability to organize things or plan things, I can't make a decision for the life of me and it frustrates me because I'm like I'm at work, I have to make decisions, boom boom boom but when I'm at home sometimes I can't make a frickin' decision, like what do you want to have for dinner? Don't ask me! I don't want to make this decision. Like it, I get stressed out that way.*

*In dispatch you might have the officer asking for this and that, another officer calling and at the same time the phone will be ringing, somebody's yelling at you and you're doing four or five different things. That as you get older and with all the crap that I've dealt with is getting to be a bit of an issue and so I've had a bit of a, not a huge problem, but I don't think management gets it.*

### **Avoidance**

*Not necessarily doing a lot of follow-up, like if I take a really horrifying collision call and there's three people dead I probably could not watch the news tonight because I don't really want to see what that vehicle looked like, especially if I had to listen to them in that car for their last moments.*

*Yeah, like you just don't really want to think about a real person with his family there and ambulance crew working on him, trying to save his life and that he's probably gonna die. Because you don't get worked on by ambulance normally and survive, like that situation they rarely survive so I think that is a situation where it is deflecting and I never thought of it that way before. I thought, oh yeah there's just a morbid sense of humour when you're around this all the time but I think that it is actually trying to avoid thinking about that.*

*When I first started, I used to read the papers, follow the news religiously and not only for me but a lot of people I've asked that work in this capacity, tell me the same thing—you stop after a while. After two years into this job I just thought you know what I don't want to hear any more bad news type of thing.*

*And it's true that you will find this common thing, and I know this because I ask everybody. The phone ringing at home, I avoid it like the plague unless somebody...I let the answering machine pick it up for several reasons, one of the main ones is the telephone solicitors, but even then friends and family will call and it may sound rude but*

*you know what? I gotta do what I gotta do to survive and quite literally it has come down to that. I have no use, I will be on the phone to return a call and short, brief and to the point but not like my wife.*

### **Barriers to Self Care**

*I'm looking...so...my problem too is putting it into motion. Because I would like canoeing and stuff like that. I think that would be so so healthy. Like kayaking or even just nature walks and that. But I seem to have a problem trying to put it into motion.*

*You work like 5, 12-hour shifts, it's brutal and I'll tell yeah, one thing I do on my first day off like I don't plan anything, I don't go anywhere, because I'm like a vegetable.*

*Yeah I've tried to get a massage therapist and they won't work on you unless you get a note from the doctor. Because you're prone to clotting so they don't want to release any nasty stuff.*

*Like again you lose a lot of things when you work in shift-work, like I used to play competitive volleyball and it's hard to do that because you can't commit because 2 of those Sundays or 2 of those Mondays you're going to be working and stuff like that.*

*It's like you try to remember like don't bite off more than you can chew like, I at this place have been constantly asked to do extracurricular activities and I never say no because I feel like I would be disappointing people if I did.*

*The one thing with working here with the shift-work, it socially excludes you from so much. If you work Monday to Friday and have weekends off, there's so much more you can do than when you work at a job where there's shift work.*

### **Breaks**

*The big dislike obviously is we get a half hour break in a 12 hour shift so that is a big dislike I think. It's unfortunate they have not rectified that.*

*I think when you compare it to other agencies that work the same rotations, I don't know why they haven't gotten it together that says people....especially in that high stress, high need, mental demand are saying its sufficient to have a half hour away in a 12 hour shift and if you're lucky, two fifteen's on either side. I just think it's a backwards way of thinking when they preach mental health awareness. They preach physical awareness and physical health and all of that kind of stuff but yet they are still not giving you the opportunity to practice what they are preaching to you right?*

*I think what comes with that then it spirals into other things. Because when you get weight issues because you somehow have to manage in 30 minutes to prepare your food, eat your food and pop right down into your desk. So your weight issue is that you get*



*people with diabetes or sugar issues. It doesn't give you time really to ...rush, rush, rush, you rush, rush, rush, you can be at a busy desk....rush, rush, rush, rush, to your lunch.*

*It doesn't give you any time to decompress or any of those things ...doesn't give me an opportunity in any way at all to just kind of take a moment, take a break.*

*It would benefit a lot of people, me included to actually have a time to just step away escape from what you are doing for twelve hours and then come back, refreshed, give you time to work out if you wanted to work out, give you time to go for walks, do any of those kinds of things. You would just feel a bit better because you could eat your meal at your desk. So you could take thirty minutes and just kind of....*

*I'd like to see more of this (referring to exercise equipment) but I mean I don't know if I'd use more of it or not because exercise stuff I'd like to see a work out room, on night shift you get a half hour shift for lunch it would be great to go...*

*And that's another thing that you dislike about the job like how people bring up the food and that. I understand not having a full dinner or meal at your desk but this rule about not having food at the desk like, I don't know about you but I'm a snacker and on a 12 hour shift I want a snack throughout the shift and sometimes you can have the odd thing at your desk but even a yogurt or something like that like. I've never spilt a yogurt in my life. The changes of me spilling, are very slim so if you could eat at your desk, if you could you know like have like dress down night-shifts or something like that. Like it would just be...*

*You can't leave the building for 12 hours, no matter what and you get a 30 minute lunch in that 12 hours, no matter what. Which I mean I don't make the rules and I can't speak for everyone but for me I look at other agencies that get like an hour lunch or an hour and a half and if you have a really really busy day, that hour and a half actually does give you energy to like recharge and come back and finish the afternoon when it's busy. Where as half an hour you only have time to heat up your food, eat it, go to the bathroom and come right back. You don't have time, to go for a 5 minute walk, you don't have time for like a 5 min TV, 5 minute phone call, like in that half an hour in 12 you don't really get enough time.*

*Well, it's more of a contractual thing. If we could get a longer lunch break, I think that would help. Just 'cause sitting for long periods of time, so if you can have an extra half hour where we actually can maybe go for a walk or stretch or you know just stand up and make a phone call in the kitchen, instead of sitting or if you just want to go lay down on the couch, stretch your back and be horizontal and totally close your eyes and relax and chill out. Then you're not scarfing down your food in the washroom like in the half an hour lunch you're all task.*

*I mean the only thing for me is that I ever think about is that I go to the washroom at least every 2 hours probably, sometimes I can make it 3 and in call taking it's easy to go up and go to the washroom but in dispatch, you have to find someone to relieve you and*

*you know like. That's the only thing I would say that makes one better than the other. I'm like ok I have to go to the washroom and there's no one to relieve me. You know it's like, it sounds stupid but you know...*

*Do I like the scheduled breaks? Yeah because you actually get and get out of your seat however will I want to take a break at 8 or 10 or...you know like some days I'm not hungry at 8 and we can't eat at our desks so like to have my break at 10 like so I like that but I think like when it's busier sometimes you feel like you don't deserve that 10 minute or 15 minute break because you're like oh I should be on the floor. Or we run short a lot of the time so all of a sudden you have a lot of sick calls like you're not going to take your breaks because when you're off, everyone's workload is more.*

### **Challenge**

*Yeah, you are actually challenged in this job and you can, meet that you know. Most jobs... I don't think, yeah like roadside assistance was fine and was a challenge until you know everything that is going to come at you but here you can work 30 years and still get it different call that you've never heard before that kind of cool*

*Excitement would be a pursuit with someone who has held up a pharmacy or a bank and has weapons. That to me...I mean it's scary and that but it's also that sort seat of your pants, adrenaline rush that you hope and pray and cross your fingers that everything goes well but to be truthful, it's also pretty exciting. But those are rare.*

*Being organized and being able to do a good job on the radio side of it and to make sure that as soon as they hear my voice or know that I'm dispatching that they feel comfortable and confident in my abilities. To do a good job for them and kinda to...I try to think ahead and have things done for when they ask for them.*

*One of the things I do like is it's ever changing. You get the same kind of calls and the same kind of dynamics but they're not everyday, the same as before. You have different challenges, different opportunities. I don't know, maybe different opportunities isn't the right word but it's ever changing, ever evolving and I finding the older I get and my maturity levels change so does my job.*

*I'm also actively involved with committees in Health and Safety so you get opportunities for continued learning, challenges....*

*Some people prefer routine you know, maybe.... tomorrow, whereas that's one of the things that I like about it and the challenges of the job because there is no day that's the same.*

*Yeah I know because that is where I have a struggle with that kind of type of thing, because my good day is somebody else's absolute misfortune, right. I like the big call the rip roaring full on big calls. The adrenaline rush and what I like is the personal thing because that is when I feel challenged.*

*I like to multi-task and when you have a lot of things you have to accomplish and then you get a common goal. Like I love that, that feeling of getting that common goal, it's kind of satisfying. I think a lot of people that work here are A-type personality, so we really thrive on this kind of environment, like doing 5 things at once and then getting it to work out, and being able to have that kind of success at the end.*

*I don't know, I like what we do, like I like the pursuits, I like doing a good canine track. I like, I mean that might sound grotesque, I like when we're busy. I like you know having 5 calls on the go and having to work and do all those kind of things and calling tows and taxis and ambulances. I like when I'm busy like even though you swear under your breath and think god why am I still busy? I do enjoy that. Like I think that you know it makes time go by fast.*

### **Cliques**

*It's the whole clique thing too that really bothers me, and I think it bothers a lot of people. That really turns me off. Especially sometimes I'm responsible or part of it as well. I really hate when, yeah know things that we would scold the kids for in school, like bullying, that stuff still goes on as adults. It's disgusting.*

*In everybody's platoon there is cliques you know. For instance if there was a group of people from here say going out for a motorcycle ride, they invite supposedly everybody with a motorcycle but I know for a fact they don't.*

*I'm sort of a bit of an outsider because I transferred down from [a different city] to take someone's job, because if I hadn't taken the full-time position somebody would have gone from unclassified to classified.*

*It's the other dynamics and the personalities that come in and the pettiness that comes out here that's my true struggle here. When somebody walks in the room and is 'oh my god look what she's wearing, see her haircut it's so ugly', those are the things that are in your high school. Yeah, everybody said it was going to get better when you got older but it doesn't. You know and that's the stuff, or 'do you know what's going on with them?' If you really cared, why don't you ask them? Why don't you call them up? Right? Don't go to the person and just ask or like just for the scoop so you can be the popular one to share it.*

*There's cliques and if you didn't get into that clique, the first year when they were all on that shift, you have no chance of getting into it...And it's not necessarily that everyone's like mean, but if you were in that clique right off the bat or one person said 'oh I don't like her because of that', a lot of people will believe that one person instead of judging on their own.*

*Like again, I'm one of those people who kinda don't get into cliques. There are cliques in here, absolutely. And as much as I like all them and think they're great, but you can kinda like see different things happen with them so.*

*We don't need the people slamming each other, bad mouthing or spreading rumours. I have been subject to false...and I just, really did you have nothing better to do? But I think if you talked to everybody in here, at some point in time they have been subject to a rumour that wasn't really what it was but for whatever reason a few people in here...keep it going and they have nothing better to do or say, so...*

## **Closure**

*Those calls produce stress because you follow them and you want to see that it turns out ok because you know what? The eight year-old that's watching the domestic, in 4 years is going to be the juvenile delinquent that's burning stuff or you know?*

*Including us in the debriefs for major events, which is cool because they didn't until maybe two or three years ago, and finally we were like you know it's rough for us too. So I think that's something they are making needs things available to us, and I think what more so needs to happen is collective debriefing with us.*

*Yeah, but we are not allowed to find out the outcomes anymore. We're not allowed to read the reports. We're shut off, we're cut off, we're you know....Yeah it's really too bad, you had to hear all of that but were not going to tell you what happened, kinda thing.*

*If we were allowed to and there was a call that I've thought about at home. Yeah! I probably would look at it, because you would have closure. Right now we have no closure. The officers on the road they get closure. We don't get it.*

*We either take the call and hear the beginning of it, or in dispatch we give it out but the officer just says clear, see report. So you don't know how it ends. You're just on to the next call and very rarely do we go back and say I wonder what happened to that...you don't, you just move on to the next call.*

*You never know really what's going and you never really finish or see like as much as there's great things about not seeing how a call is, like just hearing it, but we also miss the part of finding out what happens. Like you know, there's always kind of that 'oh I wonder what happened, like did they live, did they die? Did they...?' you know there's that always, kinda thing.*

*Some days, more just things that you know, pissed off or things where I didn't do something right or I play things back in my head 'did I do that? Yes, wait a minute I did do that.' Right? Here you can kinda play it back on the Comm Logger and say 'nah no no sorry you're incorrect, I've got that, I did do that'. But if I'm wrong I do try...I fess up to it. I screwed up, I did that wrong, I try to apologize and move on but I don't often worry too much about what I've done here.*

*That's the thing, right? You take all these calls and you think afterwards they're nothing calls, but at the time you don't know they're nothing calls until an hour later, when it*

*turns out and that's for every call, right? Every call could be the call, and then turns out to be nothing, most of the time, but it's not always.*

### **Cognitive Schemas**

*I don't see that happening on some other platoons, they wouldn't function as well being as short as we are regularly. So and that one I'm going to is going to be very short and not function well with that. But....not my problem, really? I mean I still do things the same, I come to work, I do my job and I go home. That isn't my problem, all I can do is make sure I'm being productive and being part of a team.*

*Anything involving officer safety. That's big. Anything priority where they're attending to calls because we've had some accidents that have resulted in officer deaths so you think, like gosh guys just get there safely to the call, and then worry about the call once you get there.*

*I used to get all worked up when somebody would call and be bitching me out on the phone, and then I realized they're not pissed at me. They don't know me yet, right? If they knew me, it would be a lot louder than that (laughs). So just being able to make that separation and I didn't know how to do that at first, so I took it a lot more personal.*

*I think that's one of the biggest things that I've learned, it's not personal, just sit back and do what you can with it and it's tough sometimes to realize that there's not a damn thing you can do about it. Just report, report it the best you can.*

*I try not to dwell, I try not to take them as the world owes me something... my bank accounts been emptied, he threatened to kill us, I slept so bad like...it was the things that went on and on. Could I be bitter, could I be upset? I could probably and be justified, that people say no wonder you have that. I take it as an opportunity to learn.*

*I guess in some ways maybe a way that I look at things that come into play is...like one day we were having a conversation here and...within the confines of the communication centre you're looking at all the calls coming in and there's you know violent things, people getting killed and just this relentless stream of ridiculousness and the one girl says the people, the public has no idea what really goes on. But the comment that I made was, so you think this is the real world, the world outside the doors of the world inside these doors?...and she says this is the real world. And I said I have the totally opposite view. I said when I walk out the door I don't see people getting killed, I don't see people fighting. I don't see any of the things we take calls for, almost never. So in my eyes what's outside, when I'm not here, is the real world and what happens in here is like the twilight zone. It isn't even real.*

*That's a good term, a lens that you view your world through. And I've worked hard to make a choice not to view the world through the lens of this place because you'll go insane out there.*

*The nastier the person is the bigger the smile is on my face.*

*Well it's just...the perception maybe. I don't know if it would be fair to say that that is the only focus is on...I'm just saying that perception occurs and that atmosphere is that, and there's some shifts where I know a lot of people are getting written up for stuff, and it seems to be targeted like someone's decided that they don't like you. So now they're going to hound you until they can nail you with something. The atmosphere on that shift would be horrendous.*

*So for me it doesn't generally affect me too much but you know, not doing anything wrong, takes away the power, if you follow all the rules and do your thing. But how can they improve things in here? They'd have to build trust with the employees. I don't think there's a lot of trust and too often there's the perception that people are getting picked on and then as far as from a work stand point, right now everyone's doing things differently. There's very little consistency with how we're doing things. And I think if we all...if there's was some clearer expectations...*

*Like just as I said, from working at the group home and like seeing people self abuse or overdose, things like that like for me was a more emotionally like draining, whereas here I find I can take one call and go on to the next and not really think.*

*I think there's things that you know but I think in life, in any job you're going to have stress, and you're going to have stressful situations, it's just how you overcome them and I think here there's been lots of times where you stress, say you cry about something. Then you pick yourself back up and go on so...*

*No not at all. And that's the thing like. I have consoles I like better than another but I'm not opposed to. There's not a console that I'm like oh my god I don't want to sit there. Some people have those consoles, where they can't stand to sit there. I don't have a console like that, like I don't really care where I sit. I don't really care what I do. Like I just, come to do my job and then go home. You know it doesn't really matter to me like it's all the same stuff. Yes certain consoles are busier than others but sometimes it's nice to busy and sometimes it's nice to be slow like so I don't really find that it affects me...*

*I think definitely in this job is high stress, however I think if you like make sure you think of it a certain way, and think of your policies and procedures and know that you've done everything that you can do. And you tried your best, then that's all it can be and I think life is stressful. Like I'm one of those people that I do believe life is stressful. I don't think anywhere you go or place you'll be you won't find stress. I don't think anywhere's going to be stress free no matter what you do. So I think that you have to be prepare for the stress and conquer it and deal with it in different ways.*

*Do I think this job has caused me stress and maybe health concerns? Absolutely, but I think that's part of life, like I think that you know you've gotta pick yourself back up and move on because no one's going to hold your hand and give you things and I think that's probably part of the thing is we work for an organization where we are pretty much, I*

*don't want to say it to like take it away from us, but we're given a lot whereas a lot of other places would be like see yeah later, like we're not going to give you that so.*

*I definitely think there's politics and things that go on here that probably shouldn't go on here but I think you gotta just kinda turn your back and say it happens right?*

*I don't know so I think yeah definitely, health wise, stress wise, has this jobs created some for me but who's not to say if I worked at the grocery store, I'd have the same kinds of stress in different ways.*

*And I'm one of those people who feels like I always have to do more or work harder or...like there's always more you can give and I think like in this job you're always constantly giving. You're not really...it's not like you ever get a big thank you or anything...*

*I think morale and things like that. I sat on a morale committee and I think really we can blame it on our superiors but really ultimately it comes down to our work is what we make of it. Like there's things we have control of and there's things we don't have control of and there's always going to be politics and there's always going to be decisions that you don't like, so we have to make the best of it for our self and I think that sometimes we are our own worst enemies that we sit there and bitch about people's food and blah blah blah and then we're mad that we can't eat at our desk or like we kind of make things worse for ourselves sometimes.*

### **Compartmentalize**

*Compartmentalize, I think you know everybody has stress in their life and you really need to check that at the door when you walk in here and when you walk out at the end of the shift you need to just check it. And there are calls that everybody's going to have that you are going to think about after you leave, but for the most part you just can't do that because you would I think just really go nuts.*

*I don't follow up a lot and I think that's part for me compartmentalizing, keeping a distance because I don't want to know.*

*Yeah just once I leave here, I leave it at work.*

*Well I try to leave work at the door.*

*[I have multiple roles here], so my blackberry is on 24/7 and I get a lot of calls for here so I don't...I can't really even turn it off when I'm home and on my days off. I'm still active in that, I'm not here and doing calls and I don't do any overtime.*

*It's not too often I take home the events though, that's the weird part. You would think that, oh my gosh I'm worried about what happened to everybody but I'm one of the lucky*

*ones that way that can just, no thoughts at all, be driving home gee what happened to that person. I've been able to switch that off so.*

*There's a few that I will chum around with outside of work. I try not to make that my primary relationships.*

*It's so easy to make everything about work. The thing is if you're hanging out with...I was in a relationship with [employee's name] for a few years there and we both worked here, well then everything becomes about work and you're talking about it all the time...well that's no good.*

*Like it is just exhausting and I mean some people who compartmentalize probably cope with it better.*

*After work I honestly, I try very hard when I leave this place not to go over and over the calls because there's so many over the course of a day and then over the course of a month and then over the course of 11 years, like I don't want to take it home.*

*When I go home I don't really think about my calls like maybe the odd occasion I take something home with me. Like something that maybe you know is a little more personal, or you know things like that but I don't find like I have a hard time desensitizing myself, or find where I'm thinking about things when I go home. Just like I said, the odd call here or there, or I could have done better at this, or I should have done something this way.*

*I'm not really...like I don't take a lot with me, like I don't know....Yeah, oh absolutely, like yeah. Like what happens here happens here and that's it.*

*I am a social animal, in the very least sense. There's also part of me that as soon as my shift is over, not a minute later, I'm out that door. And sometimes I think it's a bad thing and some people will wander around and talk. I don't really have any close friends here. I think in large part that's me. And I'm not comfortable with it a lot of the time. I don't know it's kinda weird, it's hard to describe. Half of me likes that buffer, I kinda like to separate my work and my home life, to keep them separate.*

*I guess for me, like I've said I try to turn it off as much as I can. I try not to take it home ummm...*

*So I don't usually hang out with anybody from work.*

*Work is work and then my life is my life. Like obviously they coexist and some things are going to be spilled over into other, but when I come to work, I come to work and when I go home, I go home. That's what I do I definitely try to keep it separate because I think that's important to keep a balance that if you're constantly bring one to the other then they all kind of mesh together.*

*Yeah trying to separate...trying to leave it all at work is a really good one.*



*Yeah, like ohhh I shouldn't have done that wrong or oh crap I spelled that wrong in the call. Or something like that but it happens we all have our days, we're not you know perfect.*

### **Compassion**

*I think an eight year old that's devastating. The person sitting next to me is thinking I have an eight year old at home.*

*Sympathy for some people. They're just in bad situations beyond their control and what are you going to do right?*

*So the positive side I guess of all this, when I get a call like that I can appreciate it all the more and I don't really tell the people on the other end 'oh by the way I've been through the same thing' but I'm sitting there and I think I'm more compassionate and I think I do a better job because I know that language, I know what they're going through, and my heart, it just goes out to them.*

*That's one thing too that like I said since with my daughter's issues and that, that I've gained so much more respect for anybody with mental health issues. At one time I was one of those ignorant, didn't know any better, didn't really laugh at them per se, but you know you'd laugh about a call and now it's like, now I get offended.*

*Where it helps me in the job I have now, it gives me empathy and compassion for people who are going through struggles and having been through some of those struggles and some of those things and also gives me the opportunity to see what I went through.*

*You feel for them a little, especially if it's something that close to home. I don't know.*

*If I talk to somebody directly involved in something then I might feel some empathy for their situation. People dying of natural causes, they're older, it doesn't. Unless I'm their family member why would it? People die when they get old, it's just a fact of life.*

*Yeah if somebody's in emotional distress that would be harder to deal with. Probably the worst thing, the worst call I've ever taken would be a SIDs death...They're both wailing, like the only way to describe it would be like what you'd see in a movie where their chest opens up and this pillar of flame goes out that's the emotion of their distress. Just, I've never heard anything like that in my whole life and I don't want to hear anything like that ever again. But apparently the police that responded to the call were really affected by it too they were just totally never heard anything [like it]...*

*Oh for sure, like the ones that are life threatening. Like the drownings, when you have kids at the beach and they say a 5 year-old hasn't been seen and you're sitting there, you can picture how frantic the parents would be. You can picture how frantic everybody else would be like they want to get out of the water to see if they can see him but they want to*

*be in the water to try and help. You can just imagine the scene and the chaos...And you just feel sorry for people, so those ones are stressful. Domestic violence like kids are involved or like even it's just a husband and wife and it's like a bad one. Anything where it's like serious and life-threatening are definitely going to affect you more.*

*Do I think some of my coworkers can be rude and ignorant? Yeah but who's to say I've never been in a bitchy moment been sharp with someone or something like that. But I think that anytime that I've had someone be rude or sharp with me I remember that this job can be stressful and sometime, it brings out the worst in us because you're constantly, sometimes all of a sudden...*

### **Connection and Comradery**

*The people here are fabulous it really is like a family.*

*The people in here, we have strange times off together and you end up doing things together you know. So you spend a lot of time at work and outside of work with people and there are some pretty phenomenal people here to get to know and you know you do have that downtime. So at four in the morning you know you really do get to know your colleagues and I think that's kind of neat, and you have this real sense of family spending holidays with somebody or for all that.*

*There's not everybody has seen you pretty much when you're half asleep at six in the morning and delirious with fatigue or whatnot, and yet you can also share Christmas dinner with because you're working at Christmas. It's pretty neat like I've not felt that sort of thing any other place that I ever worked so I really quite like that.*

*I think some people on the shift make a really big effort at good communal things. You know we will have a buffets or will I don't know make French toast at three in the morning because we can and it's not busy and there's something about breaking bread with people that is good.*

*I think you see these strange friendships that you wouldn't get necessarily outside appear. Like [coworker's name] and I went the other day to teach one of our colleague's kids how to ride a bike without training wheels. Like that, the pairing that you just wouldn't see outside of here. One of my colleagues in here I call mom and I very much feel that way, and if I had life problems I would talk to her about them probably before my own mom, you know?*

*I think that's why, on this shift, anyway people go out of their way to you know, I'm making dinner I'm just cooking for me but I'm bringing this and does anybody else want some and you kind of bring in some for everybody. We buy each other coffees frequently, we do the group things like the French toast like a buffet so that you have that you know let's keep morale up, and whatever they say about the proper footwear or whatever else, that's stupid that's going on. Let's run hour shift a little bit above that, you know people bake cookies for everybody. Often little tiny things that have a huge impact.*

*I don't always feel that way, there's other nights where I think I'm glad I'm going into an environment where there's lots of people and most of them are happy.*

*I like most of the people I work with on this platoon. And we get along well and work well together. That makes coming to work a lot nicer and a lot better working with people you really dislike and management that you really dislike, makes you not want to come to work, and make it much easier when you're feeling just a little bit crappy, to make that call and not come in.*

*When the platoon shuffle came out we had people in tears, literally in tears, looking at who they were going to have to work with for two years. And they don't...you can't just trade off, like you have to have an excuse or a reason that management deems reasonable. Just being away from your friends isn't a good enough reason and there's a lot of people that I am friends with on this platoon that are going to be completely opposite. I mean I will literally not see them at all. And that's hard. It's a support system here. I mean we spend so much time here and this is family. And this is your support system for things going on in your life at home—your marriage, your kids, your family. You come here and these are the people you turn to for support and when you don't have that anymore, that's hard.*

*When we finish this morning...like there are platoons that we never see...when we finish in a couple hours we are back and when they leave they'll finish and we start. There's never an opportunity to socialize there, and that's frustrating, you know?*

*We come in and we help through your marriage issues and family issues and work issues and great to bounce things off of and help with homework and...Really, [female employee's name] helped with my homework, she helped me write my thesis so that was good. But you know that kind of thing and that's why this comradery is so important.*

*We're trying to keep that family thing going here and you know family feast is a time to get together and socialize. Although, we can't do it quite the way we used to, we do the best we can.*

*You get good friends, you can get life long friends, and relationships here is long. You get that personal satisfaction.*

*Yeah the personal interaction that you get with people and life long friendships and the fact that you get to make a difference.*

*It feels like family at times where you have some that you just love dearly and some where you have to because they're your family. Like I say, you're always professional but some it feels like family. There is some that you have and you just accept because you have to, but there are other ones that you care to have actually in our action list so.*

*I've got a pretty positive working relationship with most people. There's very, very few that I don't get along with and but I try not to get caught up. People know not to come to me for rumours and crap, because I am not interested in it. I'm like you know what tell your story to somebody else. When people are looking for guidance on how to proceed with calls or how to do things I am one of the ones frequently that get asked, or frequently get asked like personal life things.*

*One of my best friends is on a completely opposite shift than me so that really sucks because when I'm off she's working and when she's off I'm working so we try and make an effort to see each other on the flip. Like if I'm going in 5 o'clock at night then I can see her in the morning with her kids and we used to hang out a lot with the kids and I miss that which really sucks.*

*And we work really well together like and when we come into work and you have that one person or that you can really trust or you can really have a bond with, it just makes your shift go that much better. Like if you have that tough call you don't feel like, you know you feel like you can go talk to that person and they totally get you, they understand...they're not, you know. But right now in the platoon I work on, I don't really have any close friends.*

*And for me, occasionally these friends will work on our shift, will work together because we'll switch shifts or whatever. So if I can, you know we get to sit beside each other on a shift... Oh it just makes your day! It just makes your day, you know? They're very important, like very important in making things stress free too, like lightening the mood, kind of having somebody to talk to.*

*I think it's comradery like it definitely helps your platoon if you guys are working, getting together, something to look forward to. Mix things up a little bit. We used to eat at our desks, now we can't do that so it makes a buffet kind of tricky, which was kind of a pain. You know and then we had a fundraiser where we could eat at our desk, we had to pay 5 bucks so we can eat at our desk, which was fun, it was great.*

*And during those stressful times the inspector came in with pizza, brought in doughnuts, and coffee. That was awesome! It was such a nice thank you to everybody that was working and it was busy. Like it was really great and I heard that some other platoons, like employees that weren't working brought in chips and nibblies and whatever and people at that point were allowed to drink their coffees at their desk, they allowed that. You were allowed to eat at your desk because it was just so busy.*

*Another thing is that they want it done over the phone, that's the new thing... You don't even come in the office, you just hey can you call my office at this time because we can't...you know. So there's somebody there if you call I dunno anytime of the day or night I know that.*

*I'm on D and ah, there's few probably 3 or 4 key people that for me make it fun and I'm probably someone who makes it fun for other people. Or for some other people, maybe some don't feel that way.*

*Fairly good, I get along with most people. I have a lot of fun with some people.*

*Well when you work the shift work you...you're just not in sync with the rest of society and then so what happens is within the police environment and probably other, hospitals would be the same way, the social network is the work and home social networks are really interconnected and all the same people, a lot of that goes on.*

*That's what I'm usually saying to whoever has to sit next to me, I say you got the short straw today? And then relentlessly hound them the entire shift. Yes, socially, for the most part.*

*And if two people are sitting side by side and you're both not busy at the same time you can socialize, it's great. It's fantastic, it definitely helps a shift because you can only read for so long on your down time. Yeah, so you can have that social interaction, it passes the time so much more quickly than anything else.*

*Like we got separated on the last one so it doesn't really affect me this time around. It was really hard on me the last two years because friends I was used to going to the beach with and doing stuff with, we haven't been on the same shift for two years so we've definitely grown apart and that's why I think why I don't hang out with people from work anymore.*

*That's probably the level of satisfaction, I've done a lot of community, like different groups too that a lot of people haven't like I've led a couple things and been on things so I like that and having some extra-curriculars that you can do.*

*A, I have a couple really good friends in here and then everyone else I just kinda talk to.*

## **Control**

*It's with how much conviction you say stop going to this one, and go to this one. So in a sense it is, and yes you're telling them, but you tell them in a way that's convincing or not so and that's stressful.*

*When somebody calls and they're really charged up, and they're really agitated or whatever and you can kinda talk them down, and it could be about the stupidest thing.*

*Domestics are always bad just because people are just...don't, aren't thinking, aren't doing.*

*I get more stressed out sitting in a console I'm not very familiar with and trying to figure out how to send a tow truck to somebody where I don't even know where they are.*

*So stuff like that. Just stuff that you can't control and you can't say okay well, get away from him and we will be right there. Like domestics and stuff, can you lock yourself in a room? Can you do this? Can you do that? A car accident, can you get off to the shoulder? Can you get out of your vehicle? But when you are on fire there's nothing I can do. You know?*

*When at the end of it or when one calls and they are swearing and cursing and you can somehow de-escalate the situation to the end of it where they hang up and they are okay thank you very much for your time.*

*I have my own theory on it. There's nothing, I wasn't in control of anything, right? Everything else was out of control, so a simple thing like a phone call, then I wanted to control every aspect of it and just grab on to it. That's what I was doing.*

*There was the stress involved with that, there's a pretty steep learning curve on the job here but I think I was handling that ok doing the job alright. Going through all the training and doing well at that. It was the outside forces that got control and that stress I wasn't handling.*

*With the callers that are angry and frustrated and if I talk calmly then just go phew... (lowers voice). And if you've done any work with mental health people you get that too. If you start to go, they'll just wind right into next week. Or if you, if they're screaming at you and you talk quietly, they have to... They can't hear you, they see but they can't hear you if they're screaming.*

*I think that you have a little bit more control in dispatch for the pace. I mean you don't have much control, there's nothing really proactive but if they're asking you to do this, do that, you can say you're 5<sup>th</sup> in line standby or 4<sup>th</sup> in line and you can prioritize yourself what is most important and just get the task done.*

*Dispatch can be stressful when all of a sudden you have 30 officers and each one wants you to do something, and then you have an accident, and then you have a maroon call, and then you have a death. So then you have all this stuff, and then a B & E in progress, and then you still have officers doing traffic stops so it can be stressful that way like you know that.*

*In a sense you're giving out the calls still and they're making decisions, but somebody told me once that dispatching is a sales job, and you've gotta convince the officers to go, you've gotta sell that call as important.*

*As soon as I give it to an officer, they're on the hook for it. So what I will usually do to lower my stress even if they're busy, I'll say I just need to tell you about this call so I can assign it to you. And I say I've got a 1050 on the [highway] near [road name], when you're clear I will give you details. So then it's up to them. If they don't call in for details*

*or whatever and I don't remember because there is so much going on, and it's not my fault anymore it's theirs, because I already told them once.*

*You know and I try, when I'm here, just try and be organized so that things aren't get behind, because that's how you can get stressed out.*

*I have no problem asking for help and that's how I, you know, that helps alleviate the stress a little bit. I asked for help, I delegate, you know and that seems to work for me.*

*Before the end of my shift I always make sure that everything's all organized for the next person coming in like that's, I like to start and organized and I like to finish organized. If I leave and it's really like you're in the middle of something in dispatch and the screen is really busy and there's calls that haven't been dispatched, and then somebody comes in to take over I feel kinda like, ewww sorry, I feel like a little stressed out because I'm like I have to go, you're taking over.*

*Everything's laid out the way you want it so that you're not going to make mistakes. Right, all that comes down to you lay it out so that you use a system of doing things that reduces the chance of making mistakes and once you get it all set up, you're in a position where you can now move through and work. Now sometimes it's really busy at the start, it can take upwards of an hour to get everything worked out the way you want.*

*Getting logged in, checking my email. Logging in to my systems, seeing if there's any new policies or procedures because those seem to be constantly changing. Trying to keep them in order.*

*On the air that as you get experienced in the job, you can control the air, you can control and say you're 3<sup>rd</sup> in line, you're 4<sup>th</sup> in line, I'm on the phone standby. But for newer people I think it's very difficult to keep up with them sometimes.*

*That's one thing in here that's kind of a joke that some of the ladies get their momma bear on. They'll be listening to somebody in a domestic, and you'll hear these calm ladies, just shouting at the person on the other end of the line, "Is your son there? You take him outside" or whatever, to make it not happen in front of kids and I think it's human nature you're always going to want to protect little kids.*

*No but if the police arrive at the scene and they're all wound up and excited and they need help, or they're screaming for assistance or something then that could produce and emotional response of sorts.*

### **Decompressing**

*Unfortunately, you go home and sit in front of the TV... Yeah you don't have to think, you don't have to... You don't have to process that you have to come up with a decision, you're just sitting there and pretending you're just responding and it's such a... It's a lazy break but it's very effective.*

*Yeah, I'm outta here. I'll go home but I'm usually wound right down by the time I get home, no biggie. I've got different tapes and stuff like that I like to listen to, not tapes anymore, CDs. Stuff like that.*

*I like listening to music in my car when I get off and I don't know just going home and just relaxing you know. Like not thinking about it and just going home, relaxing.*

*I would drive my 35 min drive back and forth to work. So when I leave home, I leave mom there, and get myself psyched up for work and the same thing...on my drive home I try to have it all out of my head by the time I get home. For me, I like the drive.*

*Yeah for the most part I am able to, I'm lucky that way...Unless the last call of the day is like, a really crappy one...but I've got about a 40 minute drive before getting home so...*

### **Development and Training**

*The one that I can consider to worry about the most is a hostage taking kind of situation. Because first of all our training is, it is getting better, but we're really not hostage negotiators and sometimes, it's just the way the game plays out, you end up with a phone call until they get a negotiators there...*

*When I first started 21 years ago, well it's not that long ago, but it was fly by the seat of your pants, kind of thing. Over the years I've seen the [this organization] step up to the plate and offer more training and that's good. We need even more. Yeah, a lot of times it's too little, you know.*

*Well I took the crisis intervention worker here on my own. All of certificates are on my own, yeah know, for my own benefit, but I took it because of the work we do. There's not...we don't have very good training, even [at Head Office], on how to deal with stuff.*

*You sit back-to-back with some other student in the class who has varying levels of life skills and life experience and you try to think about what a suicidal person might say and what you might want to say back again. You might think about what you might do but if you're 19, never been married, never been in a serious relationship and all of a student you get a domestic where he's kicking the shit out of some girl. What are you going to do? I have no idea. I mean you've given them no tools to deal with these kind of calls, and you don't get all the calls in training, and when you're sitting with a trainer, yeah know, somebody who can pop in and take over, you don't get all the types of calls you're going to deal with because there's such a variety.*

*So yeah, we're not trained, that's great. You're not training us on how to deal with ourselves and how we can best help them. We can't help them if we're all screwed up right?*

*More training I mean just more. I get that they don't want to train us but too bad. They*



*put us in a position where they have no choice.*

*Crisis intervention worker, you can do it online, it's through Fanshawe College and it's exactly what we do. I think that all the original members of the team that were from the original group have taken it because it's so important but it's not something that [the brass] get or push or anything. Some of our current members on the team don't have it.*

*Our professional development quarterly every 3 or 4 months we have, you're off the floor for half the shift and in here doing training of some sort. But it's more just dealing with our callers with mental health issues.*

*I took the suicide intervention, a weekend program, the suicide intervention part. But again though, that's me going to get my training.*

*To do my job better. I don't need it for myself, so I'm taking it because it's job related, and yet yeah know we've got the people who ran the course said yeah we'll come to your workplace and do it. And I mentioned it and no, they don't want to foot the bill for it. So I footed it myself and put it through the tuition assistance.*

*And the only training you get is through experience, here. That's how they train you. Is that well eventually you'll figure it out, well you might say the wrong thing for the first few, but it's alright because you'll just keep going. Yeah know, sooner or later you'll figure out what not to say. Well I'm sorry but that's not good enough. We're not offering the customer what they need and we're not offering our members what they need.*

*But majority would jump on the opportunity to have the skills, to improve their skills to deal with what we deal with. So that at the end of the day you can feel you've done everything that you possibly can and you can go home feeling good about what you've done, and whether you're successful or not at least you feel that you're able to do as much as possible and I don't think people feel that now because of the training that we received or lack of.*

*They're starting and they've got now like for educational support they are making it more and more the norm that there are courses available and having those courses available outside of ...they do what's called PDQ right, which is three times a year we do training quarterly. So it's supporting you and giving you refreshers on stuff and supporting you professionally as well. Giving courses and those kinds of things as opportunities here, they are few and far between sometimes for off-site courses but you can do them.*

*We all sit in the boardroom in groups and it costs them a fair bit of money to do it and they do different sorts of topics that they go through but where you get credibility sometimes is the person teaching it, hasn't done the work in years and they're telling you. You know they maybe don't understand what they're talking about or you'll have a situation where, I don't know, the one topic session we did was on healthy living and the person teaching it, didn't believe in what they were saying. So every time they'd say the*

*point on the slide, and then they'd make a statement that discounted it. Or added their own little twist to the point in the slide and I'm watching this thinking to myself....*

*They've had this PDQ training quarterly, which I think is great. I mean it's here still which is too bad but anytime I can go and get another course or learn something new and get away from here for a week, change of scenery, learn something...to me it's all positive and I can understand how some people with kids don't want to take the courses.*

*And I also like that though it is one thing that we do lack. Like yeah, we do have PDQ or whatever but I think that like maybe it would be good for everyone to do a de-stressing, like what helps you de-stress. And what are the stages of when you have a critical incident, what stages do you go through and when you escalate and when you go back down and those 5 stages like I think that would helpful to understand what you're going through, and what you should do in each stage.*

*Just I think that we don't really talk about a lot of things here like where you can or if you can have one day to address stress, like what is stress? And what does your body go through when it goes through stress? And like, yeah we've all heard and learned about it but do we really every really understand stress and know what stress is? And what is stress for you, so you know I think that definitely it's a learning thing and I think that they could do maybe more on that.*

*And I know someone who sat on a call for 5 hours pretty much and doing negotiating. We've never had any training in that so how do you know what to say or do right?*

*The downtime is sometimes hard to deal with but sometimes wonderful because like I said I'm taking masters level classes and I sit it and make \$30 an hour to do my homework. That's a pretty sweet deal. Yes, it's four in the morning but I'm up anyways you know?*

*For me I do courses on the side because I like to continue to learn and I know that this isn't...and I don't think I could just come in here and atrophy. I've gotta continue on and do...I don't mean not continue on here but continue on and keep learning other things as well. So things don't get stagnant in here.*

*If they get there and you've wound them up like a top then, how is that safe for the officer? We're supposed to be, trying to get these people calmed down and the situation under control before the officer shows up because they aren't trained either. I mean they're certainly better trained than maybe we are but they don't have it either but to me it should be mandatory for both sides...the officers and us. It's very good training and very helpful for exactly what we do, and we don't get, we don't get that from [the brass], that's not what they do.*

## **Distancing**

*Hopefully you have the time that you can unplug, walk outside and just get some air just for a moment.*

*If you can step away, you do but in the moment you take the call, and how much is stepping away to go outside for like 3 minutes, and come back and so yeah but I mean some days you don't have the chance talk to somebody before you leave and that's sort of sucky right.*

*Yes, you really have to stay separate from not. So yes you are going to be super compassionate in the moment and sympathetic in the moment and in the moment you're going to think this poor person. I mean why are you suicidal a whole string of bad things that happened to get you there and I feel bad for you and I'm going to be very sympathetic and do everything I can to put that in my voice, but at the end of the day what I need to know is, my job is to find out who you are, are you armed, where are you and get you help. I can't own anything else.*

*At the very least you get the person out of the room, come down here (the boardroom) or go to like the wellness room and if they wanna talk to someone then there's someone here...if not then, you respect whatever their wishes are.*

*Sometimes you'll just unplug like for a break, and go for a little walk if it's possible and sometimes it's not so once again that's one of our stressors here. We don't have the ability, we don't have the staffing to do that.*

*Yeah well it... I don't get as stressed out though over the situation when I am in dispatch, probably because you don't hear the person screaming in your ear. Right? You're just dealing with the officers. Yeah I got a 10:50 PI parties trapped, arm has been you know taken off by the door or whatever right like ....you don't ....your not hearing anything about it your not.....so... your not attached*

*Sometimes I actually have to get up and walk away from my desk. There was a couple where I cried. I actually had to get up and go for a walk because I would have just lost it if I had to take another call.*

*It was also a challenge because you almost have to step back...because you had to turn off. Your're not investigating, your not the one that's taking the basics on, so it was a little bit of a transition that way, not step back, but a transition that your not doing the investigation.*

*Work wise the days all blend, if that makes sense. And when people like go over some of the calls I really have to stop, because there has been so many. There's been just so many. If there was one or two that stand out, there's a few here and there right like... I mentioned the kids go downstairs and find their dad hanging from the rafters, a police officer hit by a car and coming on the air saying that he has been hit and you're feeling...What you feel with that is just....you know he was hit by a car and I am the one who was hit on the head with the pipe, you know, all these other.. but they all start...I'm sure I sat back and started naming and rhyming off things to you and start going, oh my gosh, wow. You let them go, yeah. You have to. I kind of take it and move forward.*

*Actually, breathing is a big one, which I'm finding when I was trying to get stuff out and back again for whatever reason now when I'm in call taking especially is before I take the beep, because it beeps in your ear. It's coming and I kind of go...[answering response], there is just like that slight pause, take a deep breath and let's go. And, it's not even...you wouldn't even know it. If you played back my tapes you wouldn't know that I am kind of going (sigh)... Let's go what are you waiting for, so that's been a big one.*

*I think when you first start this job you're kind of in like 'a deer in the headlights' kind of a mentality. I guess when you first start because you never know what you're gonna get and when the phone calls start coming in you're always tense. Like coming in, in a snow storm you're like ok this is going to be a busy night. After working here for so many years, a domestic just becomes a domestic. There are calls though that still rattle me and I get calls that, umm, that kinda hit home a little bit. Stuff that involves children, the elderly and animals, those are the things that get me.*

*Definitely unplug, umm and stressful calls would be in call taking, like dispatch can get stressful, you just take a break, but in call taking like as soon as you're done that call you log out, go to walk, go to the kitchen and get a drink. Just kinda clear your head for a minute.*

*I don't take it as personal. I think that's probably the biggest thing is I don't take the hell calls personal anymore... I mean I will sometimes at the scene but I try to back off a bit.*

*If there's a frantic call on the other end or somebody who's just screamin' (imitates a scream) you know? Not taking a chance to breathe and you can't get a word in edgewise, that one I have to really pull myself back or if somebody's just being bitchy. Sometimes people just wanna sound off to somebody. And I think I'm getting a lot better at that whereas ok go ahead, if you want to let me know when you're done.*

*Like immediately when you're first taking the call...and just try to do is almost like a step back and just "Ok what's going on here". Listen, listen for a bit. My reaction used to be to try and jump right in and start typing and taking control or whatever and now it's just to sit back for a second and kinda take in the whole vibe before you start doing stuff on it. That makes a big difference on the stress and just trying not to allow yourself to get to the same level they're at like as far as stress wise so...*

*Yeah, sometimes just going for a stroll, yeah I'll go out and I'll...I've got kind of a perch at the end of the patio there. It just happens to be the right height that I can sit my head on the...so I'll go and sit there.*

*Emotions at work, most of the time I don't feel any emotional connection with the work I'm doing. Most days there isn't anything of note that gets under my skin. Most days, like within the room, there might be, just about every shift there's somebody that gets killed somewhere so it's either death of natural causes or a car accident...But unless I'm*

*directly involved in that then there's no real, it's like reading the newspaper, unless when you read the newspaper you get an emotional response to these things, then it's no different than being in here.*

*Taking a break would be the only thing that I could do. Because what happens is if you really get something that's really...well, for instance the guy in the gun fight years ago, a very distressing event, what happens is you can't function properly afterwards. So if you don't take a break you're not going to be able to...*

*Ummm, yeah sometimes after a stressful call I'll take a break, just to like stretch my legs, get away, get a drink whatever. Go not ready like you know. Flick the button and like...Yeah know look at the screen, make sure it gets dispatched like right away. Make sure like everything's flowing properly, just to take that extra second before you're on the next call.*

*I think sometimes you feel a little bit overworked when it's call, after call, after call and non-stop like in your ear or stressful events and you're just like oh my god, I just need a minute to breathe, like you know.*

*No you know what, that's one thing I think you know too is we probably don't do enough in here is like we just go from one call to the next.*

### **Doctor Support**

*Along came new management and they said 'oh the contract says you're supposed to do work shift-work' so they just kyboshed it for everybody and they said you know 'if you need to work one or the other go see a doctor'. So that's what I did and now it's great when things were really great really bad at home. So I've had full support of my doctor, all along.*

*There's very few that aren't, that have 20 years working here, that don't have some kind of doctors note to say they can do this or they can't do this, and most of them at the end, end up call talking.*

*I'm not functioning properly, so I went to the doctor and I took 8 shifts off because I thought I gotta get my stuff together because I can't go in there, listen to people talk about their domestics and help them when I've got my own problems. So I would say that was like my big event out of the 11 years, that was probably the worst because I just felt like I got no help here.*

### **Environmental Safety/Stability**

*When I go home now and it's my safe zone now, whereas it used to be when I was with my ex-husband, I used to do tons and tons and tons of overtime just to get out and stay away. Now I know that right...Now I don't do any overtime. None. Because I find it less stressful at home now than at work and before it was vice versa.*

*In the past, well maybe I guess now see when I transferred to [this city] I did it because my ex pretty much was stalking me.*

*Like we have so some much outside stress we don't need it when we come to a stressful job. Like we know it's going to be stressful when we walk in here...we don't need any load of crap thrown in there with it. It just makes a stressful job a high stress job.*

*I mean if everything is, it's the same old story right, if it's not going well at home then you need stability at work to balance it off. And if it's not going well at work well then you need stability...yeah...and if you don't have it either place, then...forget about it...it's not going to happen.*

*Well because you come into work and you're just like, it's a whirlwind of stress prior to arriving at work and then you have to somehow carry this load, like it's hard enough to do that at work if it's busy. If you've got a clear head and you're well rested and there's nothing too turbulent in your home life. It's a challenge to do that work. If you had all this other crap on top or I guess on the bottom and then you try to add this other stuff on top forget it, you're not going to function very well, you just lose your train of thought, you can't.*

*I'm just kind of a person that I think tries not to mix work and personal too much, because if you interchange them too much then you don't have a safe haven right? If something bad is happening at work and it's part of your life, there's no balance there because everything's in chaos. Whereas at least if there's something bad at work you kinda take it home and that's your safe haven, that's your safe place. If something is bad at home, not everyone needs to know about it at work and you can come to work and kinda of thing...I'm not saying that's the right way, but for me I think that works.*

*I mean yeah I guess, I think that you know you have a bad day and you definitely not supposed to bring things to work but you do. You can be in a better mood, or a worse mood, and you're gonna bring it to work, and still think about it. It's not like just because you come to work you forget about what happened the night before or things like that. Yeah so I definitely think, that I come to work before, with you know, probably had personal issues and maybe not been as good at my job as I'm supposed to be that day or tired, I didn't feel well the night before and stayed up late, so many things play into it like that.*

*I more would equate it to the backpack only holds so many pounds right? And every bit of stress you put in it, there's a limit to what you can bear. Now again rest comes into play, like if you're well rested and you're alert you can carry a little bit more of a load but if it's already half full when you get to work it isn't going to have that much more room for what you gotta carry when you're here.*

*I didn't at first because basically, again where I was in my life, what was going on. Everything that I had that was a coping mechanism was basically shut down or taken away. So I was rebuilding my whole life right from the start, when I started here.*

*You think about the home life stress and it reaches a crescendo and this person is bringing it work, then they're not going to function properly. So if they call EAP to get some help for whatever their problems are at home, then it lessens the load at home, then their work performance will be better.*

### **Financial Security**

*Well probably a lot of people will not necessarily come out and say it, but the wages heckuva lot better here than a lot of other places.*

*In terms of having a pension, sick time, benefits this place is pretty good so.*

*It's really good money but I didn't make this money before and I lived, but you know you didn't have everything that you have now right! Like I have four vehicle, I've got a car, a truck and two motorcycles. Well, if I was working making \$10.00 an hour...*

*The financial satisfaction, making meaning because it gives me the opportunity to do some of the things I enjoy on my days off.*

*We're paid a decent wage, just under \$70,000 per year, which is a decent income maybe compared to other people, and it definitely gives me the ability to do some travelling, building a house and do a lot of those things. Benefits... and my son has had braces and he has glasses. So there's those perks, the financial the job security and it's the accommodation of all of it.*

*Is it a job that you are passionate about, that you love it, that even if you won you're going to come back? And I'm like no, I'm not coming back. I'll be the first one out the door.*

*And the pay! Pay is a definite positive, because it's fantastic the pay.*

*And got hired and decided to come here, just the stress of not having to worry about a pay check every 2 weeks I knew I was going to get paid so.*

*As far as the greater good of people, I think they're going to do what they're going to do, whether I come to work or not. The pay is good, the benefits are good. I'm too far in it, I can't leave what I do, because of the financial end of things.*

*I like that it's secure, and it's fairly stable, like there's always going to be crime, there's always going to be victims. So you know that you're kind of an essential service so there's stability, which is good.*

*A lot of the stress I think for people who stay here for 30 years, because once you get in and you have the job security and the pension and the benefits, it's hard to leave.*

*I think that [any public service] is a good organization to work for the fact that like pay wise, benefits, things of that nature. I've just recently become classified but even as unclassified, like yeah my scheduled sucked, and I didn't get vacation time, and I never knew when I was working, but like the amount I got paid and then the in Lieu Of's and things like, for what I did I would never have made other places so I don't know.*

*I think you know that sometimes you might have a particularly stressed day and you go home and cry, and the next day it's great so I think, yeah this job is stressful but do I think it's more stressful than any other job? No, I don't really like, I think sometimes yeah like, but I think that we are paid and given a lot in order to deal with what we deal with. Like does that make sense?*

### **Flexibility**

*I like the hours, I like the shift-work. It's nice being able to go grocery shopping on a Tuesday when no one else is, as opposed to an undefined job.*

*Flexibility like I'm taking it distance, but I can do that here but I mean I do other things, like curl, right and I'm sort of able to get that time off, and they're pretty good about that so it's pretty cool.*

*The time off. I'm just finishing five days off and that's just a regular schedule so that has its advantages. I was able to....I was in [city A] camping for a few days and did a bunch of different things through.*

*I like working night shifts. I know that's crazy because not too many people do. But I do, I don't think I could work Monday to Friday and get up early 5 days in a row and only have 2 days off. Like I like having time off.*

*So on my days off, if all the London people would stay here and get together, I would go to [city A], I would go to [city B], I would go to [city C], I would go to [city D]. Like I had people all over, so like I'd go all over and I would go visit them, so I wasn't here I guess.*

*Like I like being off during the week, I like having 5 days off.*

### **Forgotten/Not heard**

*the focus is always on the officers, of course that make sense when you're say, negotiating the association between civilians and officers and you're going to look out for the officers first because there are more of them, but people forget our role over, and over again.*



*As far as I'm concerned an officer, or a firefighter, paramedic is a second responder. They get there after us, a lot of times especially in [our organization]. You're talking to somebody in the middle of a domestic for 25 minutes or somebody that's taking pills while you're listening to them.*

*They need to understand our side and they bring rookies in here and that's super, but they bring them in on their second shift. Like they're figuring out which end of the gun to hold and they're like okay spend six hours in the comm center, they are not listening to us, their heads are swimming. They need to come in when they've been on for a few months and go oh that's how you do a traffic stop properly okay.*

*And yet the officer's crisis intervention, they get about 4 times a year. They meet for training, for workshops, for assistance for each other and we get nothing, like we have been through some really bad shit here and we've never been offered assistance at all.*

*Our sergeants can't manage us training wise because they haven't done the job. Being on the other side of the radio isn't quite the same thing. We're a different world in the civilian side of things, than the uniform.*

*I think they have made some attempts to, in the last little bit, to change how things are. They have involved people in conversation giving each people....whether or not they have actually taken what people say, they have done a few things when people have made suggestions, that acted upon suggestions, so they have changed how they're running business a little bit.*

*There's a crisis team as well, so if there is a major event that comes in. For officers that have been killed, they come in right to the comm centre and you can meet with them afterwards or during your shift if you needed to.*

*Because they're disposable... We're essentially Emily at Bell. It's true...that's about the...when the police officer dives in his car... We're nothing more than a robot on the other end...we're the voice that comes out of a box.*

*I think sometimes we're left out of those sometimes and they forget about us but sometimes they invite us and I've been to a few of my own.*

*I just think sometimes you look like at the officers and what they get and they get block training and they go to block training and do things like that. I think sometimes the officers deal with a lot more than we deal with, absolutely. So I'm not saying that we should get as much as they get, but I think it would be helpful for us to have like maybe a one day thing where you go out, like sometimes just getting out of the office and learn something, makes all the difference and having someone talk about stress or how you can cope, or like different coping mechanisms. Like sometimes just the easiest things that some people just don't think about, like going for a walk or deep breathing or things like that, that we don't talk about or think about.*

*Why does no one ask a communications officer because like usually when they do a strategic planning they bring in an officer, and bring in a sergeant, and they bring in a paramedic, they bring in like and everyone talks about how they felt or what they did and this or that, but no one asks the communications officer. And I think that's with a lot of things you know, sergeants or people talk on our behalf but they've never actually sat and done the job, like the people in charge have ever really sat for a 12 hour shift and did what we do. And been confided to the space and know what it's like so I kind of think that's where we're diverse to. Like people in charge have never actually sat in the seat themselves, so how do you know what's best for someone if you've never actually done it yourself.*

*I do think we do get lost in some of the things because sometimes we are the line, we are the initial line. Without us there would be no help, like you know. There wouldn't be anyone to call 911 to, and there would be no dispatch to the officers. So I definitely think our role is sometimes looked down upon.*

### **Freedom**

*There's not a lot of looking over your shoulder for every call, whereas other call centers I've worked at it's four times a week they're sitting down with you to discuss, so here they kind of let you do your own thing.*

*Well, I think it's gotten to be like some people say there's a no fun policy. I think that's the way it's gotten to be. Like if you take it back 5 years ago, 10 years ago, there was a lot more laughs in here, a lot, and especially back in the old centres before we amalgamated. Like it was very relaxed and there was a lot more freedom. You could eat at your desk. If you wanted to leave for your lunch you could go down to the mall. If you were 10 minutes late coming back, like there was a lot more freedom. Whereas now it's very structured...*

*I like my job in the sense that I don't think anyone's down my throat, demanding me to work harder or faster, or like as long as you come, and you do your job, and you do what you're supposed to do, and go home like there's nothing really. You know like no one's really like you have to do this and harder or work better or dah, dah, dah so I think like as long as you come into work and you do you do your job there's no pressure on you that way.*

*The negative parts, you're tied to a desk, you really can't go anywhere, and there is not freedom to do...like a police officer can actually leave the detachment and drive around, and if it's not busy they can get out of their car and so on and so forth, we're basically tied to this desk.*

### **Frustrations**

*So you play this really vital role and get absolutely overlooked, and that's the most days you can do it that because you've got the satisfaction of, I did my job and that's great*

*some days it's pretty frustrating and then you have officers you know criticizing you and what do they know they haven't even been in the job right?*

*Even listening to a colleague that is not a proficient call taker lets say, take a call. Firstly, you feel bad for the person on the other end, and then frustrated at the system that he or she is still here putting lives at risk, making my job harder. Because hey, if someone's going to call here and get shouted at or somebody's going to be rude to them, they'll call back, and their back is up, and their upset, and now they're talking to me, and I'm all ma'am and sir, and smiling and just taking it. So I think that's extraordinarily frustrating.*

*I think walked for like hours, just working it out and being so angry.*

*So that's one kind of stress right that you're gonna deal with in the way of going curling and smashing rocks or going for a very vigorous, very long walk or railing or whatever.*

*I know that I will swear more if I'm stressed and things like that and I don't know try to do something physical because I we never anything visceral in this job right*

*First of all a stolen vehicle to me just doesn't even cut it. I mean that's 90% of our pursuits, just a stolen vehicle. Lots of times it's a 15 year-old kid or whatever. So you've got a police officer or communications operator who's gotta do their job and try to do what we can, but I tell you if I was a sergeant on that floor, I'm sure the officer wouldn't like me very much. I would probably be calling them off a lot of the time because I just don't think they're worth...to have innocent people killed because of pursuits and then you find out it was a 15 year-old kid without a license.*

*A lot of people, they don't call the police that often and when they have to for them it's serious. I guess it's a bit frustrating when you hear co-workers fluff off those calls because for them it's taken a lot of courage for them to pick up the phone and dial. And when we treat them like crap and we treat them like they're stupid, that's really frustrating.*

*For me I'm usually grumpy. And you know at home my kids will say Mom you're kind of grumpy. Well mom's has a lot of balls in the air right now. Yes so, I kind of keep a good gage on whether or not I've got too much on the go.*

*I was eight years in dispatching [at Head Office] and I could sit at any console and do anything, and here there is still a couple I feel a little apprehensive about and I have only been down here for two years so... and after like I get mad at myself because I go you should know that you have been here for two years, and I don't, but there is so much that we have to retain, that I forget a lot of stuff. Some of my short term memory is crap.*

*So it can be more stressful at shift change. And when your relief isn't on time that can get very aggravating and your expected to be in your seat at quarter to, but if your relief isn't here five to.*

*It stresses me out more when my relief for lunch is 20 minutes late, than when I have 10 calls on my screen because you get a lunch scheduled. Oh I've got lunch at 12 o'clock by 20 after 12 I'm fit to be tied because I want to get to hell away from the desk because I'm expecting to walk away and the fact that I can't irritates me.*

*When babies die or when they are killed, there's the anger...because you also get kind of that anger, how could they? Why did you do this?*

*Because I was going through the break up when I first started here and all that went with that then I started going down hill and got on medication and what not so...I would say within 3 years and all that stuff. I mean it was a, it started out at a certain level and I think I did pretty well at first and I...it just started to go downhill. My patience was wearing thin. I couldn't take anything, I'd scream at anybody for anything. It didn't matter. If it didn't fit right away.*

*Some people cannot deal well with people phoning in and getting angry at them. They have conflict with every caller. If that's you, then yes you will not like call talking, you'll like dispatch better.*

*Yeah like work related stress would just be something that you...I would endure if it's really busy and it would frustrate me while it's happening.*

*I think sometimes you get mad, you know like you're angry at what you're dealing with or like the caller or someone that may you're working with.*

### **Gratefulness**

*But recognizing [my son] and surprisingly is a good coping, actually recognizing him for his accomplishments, achievements and you know having that communication with him, which I'm lucky he and I have always had that, but it's a good thing at the end of the shift to go home and just say hey bud love you lots. Thanks very much for the choices you've made and you know kind of do that. It's great coping. And the walk at the end of the day is the best thing surprisingly.*

*So it's funny sometimes for me to hear somebody bitch and complain about 'oh this has happened or that has happened' I'm thinking like 'oh man you know what, every 2 weeks you know, you show up, you do the job, you get a pay check every 2 weeks. You don't know how good you got it so'. I dig that part of it.*

*I don't know, again it's another situation where having been self-employed or being responsible for a bunch of other people under me I can appreciate the fact that we've got a nice place to work. We've got a pay cheque every 2 weeks. We have the climate control covered and you're never going to find a place that's 100% great, right? There's always going to be crappy things. For the most part, I think we're pretty good.*

*I think I'm in an environment where you know I'm not in heat in the sweltering heat in the summer and I'm not in the cold of cold in the winter. So I'm kind of in a relaxing place where I'm not likely to get hurt or anything like that.*

*I made \$13 an hour at the group home and dealt with a lot more stress and a lot more crap and then I came here and made now \$33 an hour to deal with half the stress that I dealt with before. Is there some stressful situations? Absolutely, like you know but I think that we're given what we need to cope with it and I think that as much as we all bitch and cry about what [this organization] does for us, we forget there's a lot worse things out there and but we've been so, we've been given so much. I think sometimes that we forget, what else could be, so that's what I always remember, oh my god this ridiculous to re-think like what else you could be and stuff like that. So I'm just like I do think the [we] have lots of programs, EAP and crisis management and you know they give sick time and sick days where a lot of other places wouldn't give you that. So I think as much as people thing that we should get more, or we need more blah, blah, blah I think like especially in today's economy with what's been going on that we are lucky.*

*Yeah and I don't think anything in life is free like I came from, my dad made great money and my mom stayed at home but they never gave me a lot and I always had to work for what I got and I don't regret it at all because I know that no one really gives you anything in life so you should be thankful for what you have.*

*Yeah, no I think that whenever I'm down or I feel like oh my god my life sucks, I have it for a moment but then I think like I start to think about how good I actually have it and it's just minor/minute things and that's I think like for as much bitching and complaining we do here and then you think about what we work with that we should all be thankful because we listen to you know people getting beat. We listen to kids that have been sexually assaulted, we listen to custody battle after custody battle and you think to yourself like why 2 people that created a child can't even drop them off at the right times. So I think like we see the worst of it, we see sexual assaults, we see kids being beaten, we see people dying way too early, we see tragic incidents, you know TV's falling on babies and killing them, and you know we see all of that. So I think that, we don't see it directly and that's like I said, like for me hearing and actually seeing it would be a different story, but I think like to be thankful for what we have, just kinda thing that you never know what tomorrow will bring and that most of us should know that in this job that you never know so.*

*Do I like getting up at 4:30, 5 o'clock in the morning? No... You know but those are things I have chosen. I have chosen to go along with this but I see people losing jobs, people being laid off, struggling to...if they are on sick leave, they don't have pay, they don't have anything. I was off for surgery last year and had 75% pay so I didn't have to burn my vacation time you know and so it changes the older I'm getting the more appreciative maybe I am actually of what I have so the little miniscule problems or issues don't seem nearly as significant any more because I know now how much worse it could be.*

## Helplessness

*There's massive challenges and frustrations with the Canadian judicial system that whether people are cognizant of it or not, you're talking to the same people, they're getting arrested, they're calling in today, and then you're talking to them again, and they get arrested again. You're talking to the same victims over and over again, and as frustrating as that must be for the officers to see that is frustrating for us too.*

*But also, ok stress in a very different way. Calls where people don't know where they are, or aren't willing to cooperate with you...extraordinarily frustrating especially if somebody is hurt, because you really want to help and you can't. If somebody doesn't know where they are, then there's just nothing you can do.*

*I have never felt so helpless more than that night...or when that was happening. There was a resident in that area, and I don't recall why they called, and they called 911, and I think it was something medical...like a medical, nothing like life and death but clearly they needed an ambulance and/or police...and there was nothing we could do. We could not get to them.*

*For me elderly people, things that happen to them, I don't know why...and children and dogs. I think it's that thing because you know they're helpless. Animal calls I have like oh my god you know I get sad about those things because I just think like they're so helpless. You don't have a lot of things, like the dog's dying on the side of the road, alright...like you know kinda thing so those things are the worst calls.*

*Sadness, especially when you hear young children being abused, the sexual assaults that go on with young children. You can build a big deep sorrow and pain because you know, full well, that child has now been ruined for the rest of their life. You need to know that there is a good chance that if I am still sitting here that I am going to see that name again because now they are going to be part of the system unfortunately, once they are victimized I think it sometimes takes away their innocence and they kind of go....and all aspects and different things right, so there is a good chance that they now, unless they have a really good support and whatnot, that goes along with it. So there is the sadness and sorrow you know?*

*There can be some sadness in there too if you...you know I hate, you're talking to somebody who's going through a really crappy time or something you just wanna...*

## Humour

*And the stupid callers can be entertaining too right?*

*And you have an officer calling, just giggling telling you that...so that's the kind of stuff.*

*Mean this shift is great. It's relaxing, you can goof around as much as we can because I don't want to say we goof around at the peril the job. We do the job and then when there's*

*no job to do and you then I think we kinda goof around and we like to joke around and morbid jokes and stuff and then I think that's really important.*

*Like we have this one guy in particular, he just puts a smile on your face and we're not laughing at him. He'll call with the craziest stuff...it's not that we're laughing at him...*

*I mean some of them are happy drunks and they'll call about something crazy, whatever it might be, we've had so many crazy calls over the years that you can't recall half of them. But yeah they do, they do lighten the mood somewhat.*

*I mean it just depends, like sometimes it's funny but for them, if they're in crisis even though we don't deem it being a crisis, it is for that person.*

*There's humour, I mean laughter and stuff. It's inappropriate for people who are doing what were are doing and not know this. But, there is definitely humour. When you get a guy that's called in sitting in his long underwear asking for police to come and help him out and you know there's an amusement in it, which is inappropriate.*

*You know you shoot the shit with your partners sittin' around yeah just kinda make light of things you know.*

*Ummm, I'm not sure, I think...I do my things the hokey humour thing, right? Which is to joke around with people, not what I would consider being particularly close with anybody anymore. Again part of that, I had some pretty close friends before I went loopy and I think, I think to a certain extent it was like nobody wants a reminder in their face that it could happen to them or whatever.*

*It was a situation in which it was very unlikely that it would be played but if it was ever to see the light of day it would be horrible because it sounded so bad. And I thought it about it afterwards and thinking why am I making that joke? Because it is bad, it is ridiculous and what I, the conclusion I came to was to prevent anyone from going down the road of wow that really sucks, that guy's dying...and it's happening right now....So if you make the joke nobody goes down that road.*

*I mean sometimes you're sitting with a good group of people and you're having a couple laughs and it's funny, but that doesn't happen very often because usually somebody's on the air. To get you both free at the same time doesn't happen very often.*

### **Inconsistencies/Instability**

*They nitpick about what you're wearing which seems asinine because they don't pay attention to whether or not you handle the call in an appropriate way. So the contradictions they are frustrating.*

*They don't get fixed and they never know how long that most officers been in here, how long will they be 'til they get promoted, maybe a year you know? So what interest do they*

*have in actually making it better? They're like a president in their seventh year, they're frickin' useless/ They can't do anything to affect good change, they have no...there's no continuity in the fact that they're going to stay. If you had somebody in here that had done the job for 20 years managing things that was going to be here for another 10 before they retire.*

*Even when I first came to [this city] it was pretty easy going. Our inspector at the time [name given] he was of the same opinion, as long as you're coming into work, and as long as somebody's covering your days you know, everything works. But unfortunately, not all see it that way. I don't understand it because I come from this totally different perspective or world, I just...to me it's like if it doesn't cost the government any more money and it is contributing to a more positive work environment, then who cares?*

*When we have uniforms that want to come in here and want to change things and that's gonna be mostly when we have sergeants rotating in for learning development for them. They get to come in and do learning and development. We don't have any opportunities available to us. When they come in they try to put their own spin on things. The unfortunate part is they are leaving, but we're not. You're going to come into my house, you're gonna change all my kitchen cupboards around and then you're gonna leave, but I'm still here in my house.*

*We all have had the experiences...we were all influenced, impacted...so then after awhile it just gets to the point where you start to resent the person who is getting the special treatment because like oh my god when is that going to wear off you know? Like have they not had enough yet, like you know? All of us have been dealing with stressful situations and you know? There's no special treatment for everybody, so why just one or two?*

*But what will happen is in a couple of months they'll start giving those things back to us, those privileges. Like they take them away and we feel like we've been kind of...raped from our, everyday comfort in here, like our little extras that we get to have. And then they take them away and then they bring them back slowly so you get that feeling of oh, oh, that's really great.*

*Oh and even if you have a really, really good reason they don't let...but then you see people switching for not really good reasons and you're like ok. It's a double standard, there's a lot of that here, a lot of it. You know you can't do that but then they let somebody else do it.*

*Well I think there's an atmosphere that occurs if you have any sort of accommodation or sickness that the management team is not on your side, that they're trying to get you off of this no matter how they can do it. They'll force you to like there's no trust with the management. I don't think the management team has a level of trust with the employees.*

*Yeah, you should know where you stand but it's somewhat depends on whether they like you or not. And I think most of them like me, so I get a pretty easy run of it and then the*



*other side of the coin is I've got nothing to lose so if you want to fight with me it's going to be an ugly, ugly, long fight. Like if a manager wants to say I'm gonna stick it to [participant's name], he's going to have an awful fight on his hands for stickin' it to me for things.*

*I don't think there's very high morale. And I think a lot of that has to do with you know the bullying atmosphere and the targeting and us against them. I also think that a lot of dispatchers are against each other, instead of all knowing that we all coming in and doing the same job and going through the same experiences and supporting each other, people tattle-tale, people want to say well you know she did this, well he did this. And instead of just all working together to try and fix problems, they start pointing fingers to deflect it off themselves. And you know it's like any job, any school, anywhere.*

*Like I don't know, I just think that in here it's like a revolving circle, it's a good month, it's a horrible month, it's a great month, it's ok like and because there's always so many constant changes. Like when you're changing things constantly there's always turmoil and chaos, it's just part of how it is.*

*I think especially from going from an unclassified member where I worked on every single platoon. I never knew...some people follow this policy on this platoon, some people follow this policy on that platoon, and then some say you can have this snack at your desk on this platoon, and then you go on another one and it's like what that's on your desk? You know what I mean so definitely consistency I think. Do I think there needs to be a little leniency yeah but I think consistency would be better that. It's interchangeable, you know like some platoons you know allow certain things that others don't. It's very different and I mean like I was just saying it all depends, there's pros and cons but there's definitely inconsistency.*

### **Intolerance**

*I find I don't have a lot of tolerance for the "I think I'm gonna kill myself". Yeah know? Do it or no...and that's ....I know it sounds horrible but that for me is...and drunks calling in being dramatic.*

*They can go either way, sometimes they can really piss you off. I've just been in a no-nonsense mood the last couple of nights. I've had it up to here with the alcoholics.*

*For me, like traffic complaints are a pain in the ass. If you get somebody on the phone and they're reporting somebody all over the roadway, and it sounds like this person might be impaired and we get a lot of them and they're not.*

### **Longevity**

*There are some people who like the feeling of adrenaline and they want...like they're totally into this work and they're just...like they think that's great and stuff like that and...maybe I was like that once when I was younger but I'm not like that anymore.*

*[Female co-worker's name] brought out Trivial Pursuit game and I know it's just a game but still, I could not answer 90% of those questions and it was not like that 20 years ago. It's almost like some of my brain cells are just not there anymore...*

*I mean I consider myself to have average intelligence, I'm concerned I really am and then again I don't know how much is this is stress-related. It's got me concerned.*

*The dispatch...the reason I say dispatch is harder is because people of my vintage... I think I'm one of the only one's who isn't accommodated somehow.*

*I don't know if it fits in to what you're doing at all but I've been thinking about this whole issue for a long time and I watch my coworkers go down in a heap, one after the other, whether they get to a certain age or length of time doing work and I'm pretty much convinced that, unless you want to, you shouldn't be doing this for longer than 10 or 15 years. I just don't think you should be here after that. Because you can't do it well beyond that in my mind, or you're not. Not everybody can do it well. Like maybe, I don't know... Age, it's harder, it gets hard with time...to be sharp.*

*When you start, when you begin, it's exciting. It's like playing a really hard video game and when you start to master it you feel like damn I'm good because you know...you've got chaos raining down and you can just go do, do, do, do, do, do, do and it all fits. And when it fits and works you're thinkin' I am a god at this, right? But eventually...I forget where I was going with that...came up with a good way of saying that and then I forgot where I was headed. So when you start you feel that excitement and you're feeling like...but what you don't have at that point is a complete understanding of the consequences of making a mistake, even a little one. You could make a huge mistake and have no consequences at all, happens all the time, or you could make the tiniest little innocuous error, maybe even one letter mistyped and that's going to be the mistake that snowballs into huge trouble.*

*You're not ignorant...like it was fun until the light bulb comes on at some point and you think crap, I could really get into some trouble here if I don't do this properly so then it starts to wear you down over time....*

*The girl that I'm teaching, when she types it's just like (makes typing noise with mouth), like it's just like...incredibly fast. Her mind works faster, I don't believe...I think that maybe I have more experience and I can apply that experience very effectively but the ability to instantly absorb information that you read, the ability to think faster, like I think like that younger you are, the faster your mind computes.*

*Well I think the younger you are, the better you can do, and part of it is the speed at which you think. I don't know, if there's evidence that supports that. Your mind is faster when you're younger. It's not that you have the lack of experience to draw on and all that kind of stuff but as you age, I think you're slower.*

*It's not that I'm stupid or anything but the mind doesn't go as fast as it used to. Like everything works 100% it's just that the amount of thought that goes through my mind in one minute, is less than the amount of thought that goes through your mind in one minute, there's just more processing going on. It's faster, so you get more done in the same time frame, I'm pretty sure. That's my observation anyway. The younger the better, and it just wears you down over a period of time.*

*People who are younger and newer. Like when I first started this job in [town name] I was like I love going to work. I can't believe I get paid to do this, it's the greatest job ever. But the more time you have on, that pace does burn you out eventually.*

*But I do go through highs and lows but I tell yeah some of the lows have been...I'm not suicidal or anything but it scares me, I mean it's scaring me So I think that in the big picture is a lot of it is stress, a lot of it is what I have been through at home an here, and I'm getting older and it's getting harder to stay healthy I think so...I remember 8 years ago, maybe 7 years ago at a course in [city name], and the warning signs were there then and you'd think I'd do something about it but... we all did this stress survey in class and I saw this guy on this side and the guy on the other side and...we all looked at our finals marks and we were off the page. That was, I remember thinking wow, never mind heart attack prone. This was like this was like far beyond that. I need to change something in my life...and of course I had never really got serious about it. So when you deal with that for years and years it's bound to have an impact on your life. And I think that's where I'm at today.*

*So that in comparison to call taking where the most you ever do is one call at a time, well I'll take the call taking.*

*No and like I said I have learned through just doing a little research myself, burn-out time for our jobs is like five years less than five...But what are they doing to keep us here for longer than that?*

*People here lack motivation and that's hard to deal with because if you're not personally motivated to say come to work then there's really no need for you to, you can't get paid more for coming to work and doing good job, there's nowhere to be promoted here, there's no carrots.*

*The other thing that I find is a downer is that it is a well-paying, dead-end job and that's how I describe it. People make a career out of it because the money is so good and the perks, and the benefits and all that. But they've said also that there's nowhere to go up, there is no ladder to climb.*

*People say 'there's no way I can the last 25 years, 30 years--there's no way I can go another 15.' I'm looking at another 5 to 7 years and there are days I'm thinking...I mean I'm going to make it because I have to, but it's tough at times, you know?*

*A lot of the problem is that you get hired here at say 24 and you work until you're 60, you're a dispatcher from day 1, until the end. Whereas officers, they get in, they 5 years on the road, then they go into the crime unit. Then they go in and be a sergeant, then they go off and do like specialized units like, they could go into anything like they could be a comm centre sergeant, or they can go in and branch out, and they can always change their career, and work with different groups of people, and learn different things, and learn new course. And we don't have any of that.*

*There are no development opportunities. That would be such a good motivator for a lot of people here. It would improve their morale hugely if we were able to offer those and they can't or won't.*

*I don't know how much of this is attributed to that and how much of it is because of the business we've been through at home, and how much of it is because of my work but it's all in there, every aspect has added a huge impact and I'm not saying I'm the person I was 10 years ago, I'm struggling.*

*I want to see that retirement date and I want to be a good employee, that model employee. I want to show up for work, but you know what, I'm struggling and I do need some help, and I've got a doctor that backs me up, and if they want to send me any doctor or psychiatrist by all means do it, because I am hundred percent confident that anybody who has seen me would side with me and say 'yeah you've been through quite a bit'.*

*It's another issue that's come out that we should be more in the officer type expectations of what are for our work longevity and those kinds of things. We should be more comparable to officers, not a person who is working front desk who is taking phone calls on regular business hours. We don't have the same job in any way so it's one of those things that you think is impacting your personal life because I am already thinking oh gosh I still have, I've got 10 years in, I still have another 25 years. Oh my goodness. That's a long time to still be doing this.*

*The problem is every once in a while, not often, somebody gets really hurt or killed and you just, you know, I'm not working that day. There's some people that would maybe want to be working for those events but I don't. I don't think it's a good thing at all. The one guy here worked through an officer in a gun fight getting killed and I don't think I would want to do that.*

*Yeah before the exercise thing, it was a different job because I worked on a shift with 4 or 5 people for...like there's different stages. It's almost like I've had 4 or 5 different jobs. The work is kinda the same but the equipment and the methods and the rules have changed so drastically, so many times. So prior to the exercise I always worked on a shift of people where I was younger, keener, it wasn't as hard for me to do the work. Didn't understand the consequences of making mistakes, didn't worry about making mistakes. But was actually, was still very good at what I did, I just didn't worry about it.*

*So prior to the exercise the few years, 5 years prior to the exercise I worked on a shift of 4 or 5 people. We all got along really well. Our standards of work were really top drawer, a lot of fun and goofing around at work. So I think that that was a different work environment much easier to deal with than the current one. Yeah, like when I started I worked at a detachment and I had a typewriter, a radio. A CPIC terminal and phone...and you actually picked up the phone to answer it. And it was for one detachment area. Yeah, completely different. And even the other comm centres were so much smaller and we were working with 3 or 4 people and everything is done in the same room, and everyone in the room's experienced. Nobody's new. It's a totally different ball game.*

### **Medication**

*And I'm actually fortunate, I'm one of the ones here not taking medications. I can cope and find ways to just chill out after. But I know that's a coping mechanism for a lot of them are on medication, a lot of people drink a lot here and I try to avoid the social heavy drinking, heavy smoking, heavy...just try to keep away from all of that kind of stuff but it is common coping here to.*

*I would say and I have no way of knowing this but of what little I do know, I would say there is at least a quarter of us on the floor that are on antidepressants or another type of medication. I'm taking a low dose of Ativan just in order to help me sleep. (Participant 2)*

*Medication, medically...I was a mess mentally, I was a mess. Then I got on medication that made it worse.*

*Yeah nobody would jump at anything either so, and then you start complaining about I'm not sleeping, this isn't going right, that isn't going right...oh well take this. So then I'm on medication to help me sleep...You're taking meds to combat the side effects of the meds that were supposed to make you feel better in the first place. So it was a long haul*

### **Morbid Humour**

*The people in here are family so you're going feel lots of highs because you're catching up with your family, siblings and parents kinda thing. And we have a lot of good times together and a lot laughs together. We always joke that we have this really morbid sense of humour that people don't understand outside of here.*

*And it's the dark humour here too, that's how we cope with everything. It's a dark humour.*

*It sounds so morbid to somebody who doesn't work here, because it's like ohhh that's not good but that's just the dark humour, that's kinda how we cope with things. Somebody died, oh how old were they? Oh that's too bad, and then you're on to the next call. But if you really stopped about it, my god that's somebody's mom or somebody's grandma that was just found. You know like, you can't do that or you would definitely, you would not succeed in this job. Or you'd make yourself sick.*

*Oh yeah, it's tough to put a lid on that because that dark humour is beauty (laughs). It's a lot of fun. There's some really good jokes that go around, that you just can't share with the rest of the world.*

*This was happening in progress so I entered the call. And as soon as I...and my coworkers are hearing me take this call and as soon as I enter it I am immediately back on focus with...something more interesting about terminal velocity, and the coworker makes the comment that no no I want to hear about what that call was about. And for me it was like, the least relevant part of the last 5 minutes was the call, and the more relevant part was wanting to know the answer to the question.*

### **Negative Calls**

*Like really that is maddening in the fact that people don't know where to direct their frustrations and sometimes we're the government's whipping board.*

*The downside to that is you are always dealing with negative, negative, negative day in, day out. Whether it's people dying in a car accident, you don't see it but still you deal with it by phone or by radio. So that's, I'd have to say that's a really tough pill to swallow at times and you get tired of it.*

*You could be just very irritated from not being listened to, and being spoken over, or getting angry for somebody cursing you up and down on the phones, and calling you every name in the book.*

*I think that certain days can be more stressful and you'll find that call taking is stressful because you talk to everyone and anyone. All they want to do is yell at you or they don't really want your help, but they're asking for your help but they don't answer anything so I find it frustrating sometimes, like being in call taking for 12 hours all you do is get shit on.*

### **Organizational Support**

*I think continued learning opportunities for shift-worker health those kinds of things to may be, help support people a bit better.*

*There was no debrief, there was no follow up, there was nothing. Both times I was dispatching so there's other stuff going on, yeah know.*

*You know next time we have something like [the snowstorm highway closure] it will happen again. We will absolutely reinvent the wheel and start from scratch. You know we had one shift keep all the calls open because all the vehicles we stored were still out there and then next shift cleared them all off because we've got other calls to look at. Okay there's no policy and the policies deliberately vague because how do you plan for all this?*

*But thankfully I had a workplace that was very accommodating. I was almost off almost a*

*year, going back a few years ago, at the very worst.*

*Like if it's really bad deal then, like we had officer killed last year, so the dispatcher was brought in for debriefing and sent home and all that. So you go the full distance.*

*Yeah years ago in [town name] I was dispatching for [another town name] detachment and an officer got killed. I didn't do anything wrong, it was nothing I did. I was amazed at how it stayed in my mind for days following. My involvement was next to nothing, really. Like I was his dispatcher, but I didn't even speak to him that night. He was hit by a drunk driver, well we assume it was a drunk driver. Anyways, to make a long story short, about a week into it, we got a call from a psychologist, the [company] psychologist that was willing to meet with us and we said sure. I mean the people who were working that night. And I'll tell yeah, talk about a burden lifted from your shoulders.*

*Had some very...you know for the most part, when things were really bad, a Sergeant, I would talk to him about what was going on at home and that, he was very supportive. Whatever it was that I needed to do...so on and so forth.*

*But where I would get upset, or where I will get upset is if they start questioning. If they don't buy what my doctor's saying...I'm fine to work. I mean my sick time is down considerably. I'm a fairly good employee. I'm not the best but I'm not by far the worst. I don't want to cause anyone any grief. I'm the fly under the radar kind of person because I just don't want any hassles. I suppose in that sense, I don't know, I just...they say they're here to help and they are in a certain way. They have their own agenda.*

*It is crazy what we deal with, and what we take home is ridiculous to have no support system. If you want assistance, you have to go find it on your own.*

*Maybe we should think about inviting the dispatcher and the call taker, after? Oh yeah, that might have been a good thing. Yeah it would have been, would have been helpful.*

*So we do a really poor job of helping our members and then we wonder why we have so many people suffering from post-traumatic stress. Well, geez...our program with PART is only 3 years old, so before that there was nothing and from the last 3 years to now we're very limited because we're not supposed to do anything, but hand over the card. Well that just doesn't cut it. We've done a poor job of training and assisting our members.*

*Our management knows what we do here, but I don't think it goes any further that because none of the other comm centres have dealt with an officer death since this program has started. So three years we've dealt with, I think we're up to number eight here between on and off duty. That's pretty significant right? In one comm centre and no other comm centre in the province has dealt with it. So therefore their programs are probably much less of what we're dealing with.*

*There was a debrief in April or May and they sent one call taker and one dispatcher. Well I stayed here for several days away from my kids, camped out at a motel and I worked*

*and I sat at the [town of the snowstorm] desk for three shifts in a row, nothing.*

*I said how about stress? How about how to help our members, help our other members? We have people on the PART team dealing with all of this stuff, we've got no support for them. You have to go get your own support system, coin. And go find your own counsellor because we are not able to offer anything, internally. There's nothing from management saying 'oh my gosh this team has dealt with so much crap in the last three years and we've just left them'. We've got no debriefing. They've done 2 debriefs but that's it and they've done none for the team, like there's been no ...*

*Depending on what shift you're on and most often here it's like I don't have any problem with management at all. I think they're great.*

*There's no compassion. No exactly, I was in here balling my eyes out and saying I don't know what to do and they were like well suck it up and get in there.*

*Yeah well but on the other hand, my father was sick in intensive care for eight weeks because he was in a coma for seven and a half. They were really good to me at work. I'm not coming in...They just...they let me use up all my vacation time and then when that started to run out I could have asked for a day of compassion if it lingered longer.*

*More support for stress and whatnot.*

*Here they allowed me to adjust and work straight days to get my schedule back on track, and now I'm back on to working regular rotation now again.*

*They can put posters up and be aware of this, and they can offer support teams when you have bad calls. They are all good, necessary, absolutely necessary to include you in debriefings, and do these kind of things are really good proactive things here.*

*I think here one of the things that they could work on a bit more on this, obviously breaks, but at the same time then do a little bit more proactive, your back health, shift work diets, do seminars, speeches, things that you can get...give everyone learning opportunities.*

*I mean I've been supported in my endeavours and things that I have wanted to do, and opportunities and you know even for physical if I wanted to. When I was playing soccer I could use a couple of hours at the beginning or end of a shift as long as we have it covered so I've been lucky. Maybe other people, I don't know, I think have been as lucky. I'm assuming they have been. I know other people have done courses. They have been able to take time out so they are supporting not only a professional, but a person's determination, desire to learn and to continue things.*

*There's more available to us in the last few years than there was when I first came here. I think when I first came here there was EAP. You know, well here's the number, there's a card somewhere you had to look for, or ask somebody hey do you know what it is?*



*There's now the information now readily available and posted. They've got the peer support team. They have done a lot of progressing.*

*EAP which then has I guess, I mean, I haven't used it here, for what they have told us I mean I could be clueless to them because they have actually educated us, there's online support. So if you really were in any need you could theoretically go online and chat with them from your desk as long as it's not busy so you could get immediate support on line, chat with somebody right there.*

*I mean there are times, I'm sure we'll get to this, but there's been times where there's been tough calls and I can't shake it a little bit, but there is an EAP program you can call if you have a problem or need somebody to talk to.*

*Well there's the EAP, which is the employee assistance program. That is available 24/7 at work or after work. I've never used it, I hear people have used and it's very helpful. They offer anything from, if you're having problems in your marriage you can get counselling and like you know anything. Doesn't have to be just work-related stress. It can be anything in your life they can help kinda guide you in the right direction, give you contacts and stuff, which is really cool. So that's the biggest thing that this organization offers, I guess.*

*They're starting to do more and involve the dispatchers and in those debriefing sessions if there's a big thing, but I think one thing they could do is do it in a more timely manner.*

*Well they have the EAP. Which I'm sure people have touched on before.*

*I think the debriefing they have for major events is great. I've never been to one, but I think they're great and development.*

*So for a whole career, I think it would be easier if you'd be like ok you know what, we're starting to see some burnout here, we're going to cycle people in to these admin roles. We're going to cycle the admin people in to dispatch. Like if you could cycle every five years you'd really have more satisfaction in your job, and rejuvenation because you would know like oh my god I'm burnt out, next year I'm moving, I'm going into this role.*

*I think that for most people if you went and said to your sergeant I need 15 minutes to clear my head, I don't think anyone would say 'no you can't do that'. Like even if the board was beeping and all that.*

*I think over the time we've had debriefings, I've gone to a couple myself. Where a major incident happens, like sometimes even just good debriefings, like what we can do better for next time, those are always helpful because you get to see the other services. Usually ambulance, fire and police are all invited. They have like a psychiatrist doctor and things like that.*

*I think that definitely that there's always more they can do, do you know what I mean? I think that no matter what I don't think you'll ever get... you'll never get to that point where you have enough things done.*

*I think there can always be more because what works for some people doesn't work for someone else, so you need a variety of things. Some people are hands on learners, some people are book learners, like same with stress. Some people internalize it, some people externalize it. So I think there needs to be lots of different things because you never just hit one group with one thing. You need to do different things in order to hit different groups of people. Like when we talk about diversity and culture and things like that, so we have to be diverse because you're not hitting all the points.*

*And if there is like a really serious call I have seen the CO3's go over and ...and they are pretty good they will say okay, you know, walk away and take a break, go have a smoke or do whatever. And like when one of our officers was shot and killed, they told the dispatcher to go home. Right! We all worked that day. We all knew what was going on and all of us were touched by it, but the person sitting at the desk... But then on the other hand people think that those people sometimes get special treatment because they have been through that traumatic experience.*

*Well there is some, there has been some talk about stress and so it's kinda funny 'cause they are acknowledging it and they are starting to delve into it a little but it's still kinda of a... we don't know what to cover yet so...*

*They could do like chair massages and stuff which would be awesome. You know and just letting us have that you know, letting us drink our coffees at our desks you know, and half the time honestly you have to pour them into these cups, well I spill pouring it into the frickin' cup! Everytime!*

*Years ago we used to have no dress code, on night shift, you know you're tired, it's nights, and you're busy. You know sometimes you're not feeling so good, feeling a little bit, as women you get crampy or whatever. You want to wear more comfortable pants. They're still nice but maybe they're the lululemon comfy pants, but you can't wear those but nobody sees you. We used to be able to wear them, but now you can't.*

## **Peer Support**

*Now we've made, with the PART team, we've made that a priority. If somebody has had a bad call they are, we are getting them unplugged and we are getting them away from the desk for a few minutes, even if it's just to go outside for a little quick walk. Yeah know, do you want to talk about it? Do you not? It's up to you. Here's my card if you want to, that kind of thing. That would be about the extent of about what we are able to do here, unfortunately.*

*So the PART team, there's four of us. We're pretty much one on each platoon, on the new shuffle we'll definitely be one on each platoon.*

*We're simply doing what we were doing before, which is just listening to what people are saying. And that's the what people want, you just want an active listener and so people don't want to see, 'I'm really having some problems' 'ok here's a card' 'No, no, here's a card' 'really you don't have money? No, here's a card'. That's not helpful.*

*We have no idea what you expected but this is what we had to do to because we had some pretty traumatic incidence here with officers and this is what we had to do. So we did what we needed to do because you weren't there to support us or help us. So don't you dare come in now and say what you did was wrong. I don't think you have any right to do that because you didn't do anything to assist in the process in the first place.*

*There's peer support team here as well which gives you an opportunity where they have designated people. They have cell phone numbers and whatnot so if you were struggling through a shift then you could call them.*

*The PART team yeah. So I'll sound off to them.*

### **Personal Circumstance**

*This is going to be my third marriage. My first husband used to beat me up.*

*My partner has a lot of health problems so that's a sort of that's been pretty stressful.*

*I haven't been coping well to be quite honest. I've had some personal, family issues over the last 10 years as well that's really messed me up.*

*I have a daughter that, oh my gosh she's put us through hell. Not her fault, she's sick, she's mentally not well, she's on the autistic spectrum.*

*Continues to be challenging now but not like she was. Anyway (clears throat), that's been the most stressful thing in my life and it's almost taken me down quite literally. I mean we were dealing with for a few years constant attempts, how serious it was I don't know, but she swallowed a bunch of pills, self abuse, she'd cut herself.*

*Family life is stressful, my house and it doesn't help to have a stressful job to go along with it. Yeah so, so there's stresses everywhere in my life so...*

*My father died in 2002 so it was pretty stressful. He was only 63.*

*I found out my ex-husband was gay...while we were still married and that sort of really threw me for a loop.*

*I just said there's too much stress for me...so there's nothing, so I talked to my kids they all wanted to stay where they lived in Barrie. So I had to come down here without them so that caused some stress.*

*And he's using drugs and he's being very bad, and he hasn't talked to me since March because I want him to go to school, and I want him to stop smoking dope, and he won't speak to me, and his father won't make him. So that's been...you know. [Partner's name] and I went on vacation to Florida and when I came back, the day after I came back my ex told me he had kicked my son out and he was barely sixteen.*

*Well you know when I was in that program my sister had just passed away just six months earlier. So that was the big hurdle to kind of overcome with the hardship. As a young, young child my dad drank a lot and then it got to be an ultimatum for mom and she said either you quit or you lose everybody. And I mean as an early teen I didn't really understand it, as an adult again your perspective, your experience and your knowledge changes a lot. I admire my dad for that, because I now see how challenging that is to overcome...you know.*

*As an early twenties, when you are a single...personal things, I am twenty-one years old and I had been with a guy and I got pregnant. And he became quite heavily into drugs. I moved out when I was pregnant, moved back in with my parents, shortly after he was born, death threats was one of the things we dealt with.*

*I think having a family makes it challenging. My husband, he works Monday to Friday, he works days and when he's off on the weekend, he's worked all week. He's off on the weekend, well I'm working and that causes some stress.*

*And you know and I think it's just kids, having young kids and kids in general, like it adds a level of stress to your life.*

*Well obviously I had the separation/divorce after 18 years of marriage, that was, that was a tough one. Then kinda rushed into another...reconnected with a friend from high school that I hadn't seen for like 20 years and we got married. Within six months I was living with her and we got married within seven months. And that didn't end well, so we both thought we'd known each other for 20 years but really we hadn't seen each other for 18 of those, right? So yeah that was very stressful, the way that ended. But just dealing with all of that and going through the depression and what not of the first break up.*

*When my second wife and I split up, it was a nasty argument and what had happened is she had called 911 and it went from bad to worse basically. I was locked up, and was away for awhile right.*

*I don't know, my personal life that you need like a flow chart to describe it...just to understand the relations between all the people but so I guess that's stressful.*

*The normal in this is industry though seems to be just like a ridiculous train wreck of a personal life. There's a lot of people in that position.*

*I'm not from here and everyone that I went to Western with, don't live here anymore. And all my friends are married with kids, so they're all doing their own family thing and the boyfriend's not in town, family's not in town. Like it's hard on your days off, like I try to keep busy but I don't necessarily have like one go to coping mechanism for that.*

*So I couldn't function and he was or is an officer so he ends up telling people at work that I cheated on him, which wasn't true and it starts trickling back to the comm centre. So I'm thinking, you know what that's your coworkers but it's also my coworkers. I'm going to set the record straight and follow it up with an email to a couple of these people saying I didn't cheat on him and that's not what happened, this is what happened. You make up your own mind and he ended up going to [the local] police and saying that that was criminal harassment.*

*They ended up proving that I was not in the wrong on a lot of things. But the reason why my life turned around is because, I don't know how this happened, but the guy who was representing me, ended up dating me after that.*

*We were able to support each other. And when I got that support from him, my time here improved because the front office backed off because they knew, I don't want to say in his position but they knew that. It's all politics but I was like, I was right on their target and then once I got off target, work's been a lot better.*

*My most stressful days are when I'm coming in for nights at 5 o'clock and I have my kids all day with me at home, we've been up since 7 o'clock, we're goin' all day. I'm doing laundry, I'm doing everything else, making lunches you know, doing everything. And at the same time, mentally preparing myself to come into work like getting, thinking about what we're going to have for dinner, what am I gonna pack for lunch for work and then... ok and you know and then my husband gets home and I head out. I hate those days. I hate them and I've tried to figure out a way to make it less stressful for me...still working on that.*

*For our other daughter, who is probably for all intensive purposes is well-adjusted, no mental health issues, but she's damaged because all of our attention has been on the other one for all these years and she is feeling like the one who's been left out. So unfortunately for her she's not a squeaky wheel, so she's always been very quiet and she's been easily overlooked.*

### **Personal Life Priorities**

*If I'm on a short shift and they're short and if I have no other commitments to my kids then I will stay, but that's only been this summer, 'cause we're so short. But usually I don't even do that, I work my shift and that's it. I do not come in for overtime. I need to be able to say to my kids this is my schedule and when it shows that I'm not work, then I available to you guys.*

*And I find that the shift work is hard and I find that 60 hours, like this block is a 62 hour*

*block, is a long time. More so that I don't get to see my kids, especially because on this block because I won't, I haven't really been with them since Tuesday and now it's Monday and I'm not up until after lunch tomorrow. So that's a long time to not really be playing an active role at home.*

*Right so I'm going on Thursday, I have an appointment with my Doctor to see about working part-time instead of full-time. But I'm giving a lot up because of my illness.*

*So there is an advantage that way and when my son was younger it gave me the opportunity to go on field trips and do all those kind of things that have been a definite reward.*

*My first pick was nine hours because I was thinking long term in this job. Nine hours for me, with a family, with my lifestyle, that's the way it's going to go.*

*And for me I go home at 2 o'clock in the morning if I'm working nights, I'm sleeping by 2:05, like seriously. I can do that. Like my friends, they go home and they watch TV for about an hour and a bit but no, I go right to bed because my kids get up at like 7 and then I'm up with them at 7.*

*So I guess from day one when I started, when I got classified, I managed my stress in making my shifts nine hours instead of 12. Ummm, I try and make time for myself outside of work so that's important.*

*When I said the shift-work, I mean it is a bonus too when you have kids to be working the shift-work because I am home a lot during the week with the kids, and I can help out at school, whereas the people working Monday to Friday days can't do that.*

*So you have to juggle your schedule to make those special events in life happen no matter what day it is, like you have to do all of that. There's a lot of juggling, a lot of scheduling time, and you know you have to be able to do that or your whole world will fall apart around you if you couldn't balance everything or balance everything.*

*People who work 12, they have to sleep all day, you know and I don't really have to. A lot of people who do work the nine's don't sleep but I do. I figured out that that works for me, makes it less stressful for me. I have to get a little bit more sleep so...*

*If there's something going on at home with the kids, or your partner, you don't like to...that's first place for me. I don't...yeah if anybody's got something going on. They're sick, they're not well, I want to be there for them and don't feel right about being here which...that's where my mind is so...And quite often that will happen and there's no, for me there's no choice in the matter. Like if my kids are sick and they need me or something, say yeah I'm not coming in today.*

## **Personal Support**

*It was after we separated and after I had met my current fiancé that I stopped getting anxiety as much. I get it occasionally now but it is rare and it doesn't last. It used to like...it could last for a whole month and never go away and now it comes and goes and doesn't really last too long. Once I go home it's like I'm happy to be there now where I wasn't before.*

*So I think the stress of the job before, I didn't have the support of my ex and now I have that support with my fiancé although he really doesn't want me working here.*

*You know so those are just some of the things with the coping, where you end up with those relationships where people actually can open up, you can say you know, and friends, firefighters, that are our friends now those are the kind of things where they kind of go hand in hand where your personal relationship is as much as here can give you the opportunities.*

*They are both good role models, I have been fortunate that way what people say about your parents and what you did you know.*

*But the Will Smith song, 'Just the Two of Us', which is a goofy song, but there's one line in it that said 'hate in your heart will consume you' and I was listening to it and that line when I was going through that and I went it does, because your focus is your hatred and you're angry.*

*I'm fortunate to have my husband who works straight days, so that's a good balance to help with the kids and everything, so that helps out that way. Ummm, you know it's a big juggle, but it's worth it.*

*And when you go home and you have a stressful day and you squeeze your babies and their life is just sunshine and lollipops, it makes things better. It's a distraction.*

*Yeah, that part's big, to have somebody home that you can talk to or just to have somebody at home who is happy that you're home. That's big because for a long time too even after the second break up, I'd go home and wasn't anybody there, and like holy crap, you feel lonely enough but that's really lonely, the cat doesn't talk to you very much.*

*Just a couple of them are pretty good friends that have talked me through some stuff so I can listen to the stuff that they put out to everybody and it sounds to me like they're talking to me directly. 'Hey dumbass, listen' (laughs).*

*I say it was catastrophic but within a month, because this new relationship was forming and he was in the union and he had answers and plans and everything else. It was like professionally helping me with a plan, but also personally helping me so it was like once him and I started, like you know, supporting each other through our break ups, I didn't need EAP, because he understood the workplace and all the dynamics.*

*For myself I think I just try to spend time with my friends and family...*

*Another big one is going home and giving my son a hug, which I'm thanking him for what it is. Thanking him for the choices and the direction he is going.*

*I wasn't getting like...I knew that something was wrong obviously with him because he's gay or bisexual and so I looked outside my relationship for the happiness and to try and cope and it didn't work. Just made things more...stressful and combobulated.*

### **Physical Activity**

*I think sometimes there's just stuff you just need to work out right in a physical way, like walking or working in the garden, or you know something. I have a trampoline, I bounce aggressively you know.*

*I really haven't put it into effect and that's physical exercise. I'm just not that much motivated in that sense. And I know that if I got serious, that would be such a tremendous positive thing, and I'm trying. I mean I do go for walks and that but I really need to step it up, otherwise honestly I don't think I'm gonna last another 10 to 15 years living, never mind at this job. It does take its toll, shift-work and everything.*

*Yeah but my biggest failure is a lack of exercise. I know that would be such a tremendous help. I'm guilty as charged.*

*If it was a full serviced big gym people would, because it's the same as going for a membership somewhere else before work.*

*I play baseball, in a girl's league on Thursday nights and that's sort of a release I guess, my time, but you know and I just try to take time for myself now and again.*

*Oh yeah, I mean for sure. That's the only reason I'm sane, because I run everyday.*

*Made a real effort with the physical exercise after work it's a thing that helps. I'll go home and come in the door and just feel like I should lay down and go to sleep. Like I'm just zonked right, like mentally, physically fatigued and I force myself to go out and run. And I always find that I feel fine after I run. One hundred percent.*

*Then once the load is off and I'm done my shift, then I'm usually pretty good if I go for a run or whatever.*

*I don't know who uses all this stuff because you don't have the time (referring to exercise equipment in boardroom)...Yeah it's great in theory, it's nice to look at but I don't know who uses it.*

### **Physical and Mental Health**



*I have medical problems. I have acid reflux disease and irritable bowel syndrome and I suffered from anxiety for probably four years for which I have gotten over. It felt like a lump in my throat that wouldn't go away and it just felt like it was a lump that just sat there, and sat there, and sat there, and sometimes it was so bad I would just try and cough it out just not even realizing that I was doing it.*

*My irritable bowel kicks in or I get an anxiety attack.*

*Sometimes I need to take time off it gets so bad, like I have gone where I've felt nauseated for days on end. Where I've had diarrhea for days on end. Like just...irritable bowel syndrome is not pleasant.*

*I have been called in for an attendance meeting and they said I would have to go and see a doctor before I ...my family doctor before I ...and I said well I've been avoiding him because I know he is going to tell me to take time off work. And when I went in and my fiancé talked to him and he said she can't live like this, this isn't good like...she's going to...like I'm 44 and my family average is 65 before they die. Yeah and you know I am suppose to work until I'm 65 here.*

*Overeating maybe a little bit. There have been times when you go home and you just...you have had a terrible day so the last thing you want to do is prepare yourself a good chicken breast and rice and all of that. There are days I'm exhausted and spent, and I go home and crack open a bag of chips. Yeah there's your dinner. You have a can of pop, totally wrong. You handled a stressful day so here's an ice cream, you know those kind of things. Or you're stressed and so you just got home, you go to bed and you haven't prepared yourself a meal for the next day. So there's those kinds of things*

*To be put back on an attendance thing and not because I have necessarily been off having surgery, it's not because of that. It's more just because I was getting sick. Getting sick or....I needed to do something and I knew that I wasn't...I'm not ill. I'm not an ill person, like if there was a flu bug I was catching it whereas before I was the one that you know my nose is a little runny you know and everybody else was sick around me and I would be healthy and fine with the occasional bouts of you know being sick...really sick.*

*I definitely get tension in my neck and my shoulders. It's my left shoulder, I don't know what it is but I get...it hurts.*

*Well I went off work with a heart issue and I had a minor attack so I had an angioplasty done and cleaned me out and I was fine but then I started getting symptoms again. We couldn't figure out what was going on, well it turned out in a round about sort of way that the heart was actually a symptom of what the real underlying problem was. I've got a blood disorder, my blood is too thick so it just needs to be...not on blood thinners. Well not other than a bit of Aspirin therapy they do, but I'm on a...I get a blood letting every so often. They drain me.*

*You work out, you're feeling good and you get sick and you gotta stop. Maybe it was the working out that got me sick...no. I don't know, I don't think there's ever going to be one thing.*

*Well, the other jobs that I've had in the past were working at a lumber yard, and changing oil on cars and stuff. It's a completely different type of work. Less physical, well sitting in a chair for 12 hours as, it takes its toll is, but certainly the work was completely different.*

*No, but I work pretty hard to stay in good shape. I eat good food, I don't eat much meat. I run all the time. Part of that is because we sit in a chair for 12 hours. If I didn't do those things I'd feel like a bag of garbage.*

*I know, the benefits are huge, so nobody leaves and you've got a workforce...like I don't know what our sick usage would be at. Like in comparison to a branch at the bank or an office job, anywhere else. It's gotta be. It's way higher than the police, it's higher than...I think it's ridiculous on the scale the problems that they have. And until they...where this is going to start to change is when they realize they can save money if they do something different.*

*So it was horrible, it was a horrible situation and I didn't realize how much it was affecting me until I started just like dropping like 15 lbs like instantly in a month.*

*I'm not one of these people that goes home and drinks like 2 bottles of wine, on my days off. Like, I'll have 2 glasses of wine but I don't do that.*

*So I think that's why my weight fell off. On a typical week, I'm like everybody else I can gain so but that's not usually an issue.*

*A year ago I was diagnosed with [medical condition], it's genetic however, a lot of it's stress related and so that's something I realized like and I did, but I still came to work...so you know I spent a few months here where I was like sick and still working here and [with a lot of symptoms] but so that's one thing I think like we don't take care of ourselves where we realize that our jobs are stressful and then you don't care of yourself properly, whether sleeping, eating, you know shift work and same thing right?*

*I mean it's definitely affected my health where I lost 40 lbs last year, which was a great thing but it wasn't a healthy thing, you know what I mean? It was because I was sick so and again whether this job caused some of that I don't think it was the direct result, it's a genetic thing like it's not like that but I think it definitely played a part in stress you know and feeling the stress of this job.*

*And that's the same thing with shift-work is like you know what you should be doing, however it is hard to eat three meals and then when you're switching over, like I find when I'm switching over from days and nights like, I can only sleep for like three hours and so I can get back onto a schedule. Do you know what I mean? And then sometimes*

*when I work nights I'll eat one meal and then sometimes when I work days I'll eat six, so like you know? You're just constantly, like one day you're up for 24 hours, and then the next you're up for 10 so...*

*Depression is one of them, it's affecting me. I don't know how much of that is strictly my work because this does have an impact.*

*I know I'm suffering from some depression. And I think my dad had some sort of depression. So I don't know how much of it is biological. But I have like mood swings...not bipolar by any means.*

### **Positivity**

*So you're gonna get out what you put in. If everybody around you is in a bad mood then you're gonna give that back out, it affects everything, everything in your day.*

*I try to be positive as much as possible we all have those bad days, but on the positive side you know you do feel that you are helping the public and the officers.*

*I think I have a good relationship with them because of my other roles, and I'm not a negative person. I'm a positive person so I know I get along with everybody. I don't...it doesn't mean I like everybody, but I don't believe they know that I don't like them, I do try to be...I push that with my kids too. You don't have to like everybody but you do have to respect them, and I do respect everybody and I can work with everybody and I work well with everybody so.*

*I have a positive work environment but I also set that for myself, right? I choose positive. I ask people, how are you? What's going on? How's your day? Do you need something? You don't look so great today, what's going on? You know, so you set that for yourself right, or if somebody gets their hair done, I like your hair. You make those separate little attempts to make, so they have a smile and your day is settled. Invest in people and you will be invested in.*

*My work environment I find it to be a positive, rewarding environment, however, when I listen to other people, I also see that there is several people that think that it is not a favourable place to be, right? People have all kinds of issues and problems that they may be dealing with though here.*

*I try not to feed into it, because I think it can really poison you if you become part of that problem.*

*When I come in here, I'm positive like I start my day positive but no matter what's happening at home this is...like I like coming in to here and I try and be positive with my co-workers and positive with everything. I think people would probably say that about me, that I'm a positive person.*

*Like it's not, nowhere's really fair, and have I been screwed over here before? Absolutely but like oh well move on...*

*So if you try to come to work, and you try to have fun, and you try to look at the positive then it probably will go that way. But if you come to work, and you're Debbie Downer, yeah it's probably going to be a crappy shift for because 'A', no one wants to talk to you and...like...I'm one of those people who's like power of the mind. If you come to work and you think it's going to be a shitty day, then it's probably going to be a shitty day. If you come to work and say it's going to be a good day, then it's probably going to be a pretty decent day.*

*So I think just what I said, I'm a big person, it's what we make of it so, have good relationships with your coworkers and your job will be a lot better. If you don't have those relationships, then it's not going to really go anywhere so...so again just my personal opinion, but yeah, I don't have any problem with my co-workers, sometimes I think, I look at what people do and I think 'oh my god, what are they doing?' but it's none of my business, not affecting me.*

### **Power Structure Dynamics**

*The other challenges are being civilian because your manager's never done your job. How can you ask for constructive criticism of somebody who doesn't even know the most rudimentary things? So, I think that's extraordinarily frustrating, and I think with other police services they are usually, civilians are managed by civilians, so that's going to be different and unique challenges in [this organization].*

*Oh another sergeant coming in, great, what are they going to come up with? What are they going to do to our world? This is our world, it's not theirs. It's only a stepping stone for them. So that makes it really frustrating for us.*

*We'd like you do this, we respond really well to that. Hey, we'd appreciate if you guys could do this, ok great, no problem. You shall...we don't do that well.*

*Well there's you know a lot of what goes on here with the...we have to have sippy cups at our desk, and we can't wear running shoes or jeans or...you know? I don't mind that so much, but just a matter of being told just like we're children.*

*The Association, after they read the letter, brought me into the office and gave me flowers because they are like, 'Thanks!' No strings attached just thank you, kinda of thing. So yeah it took a long time to get that, and then I was told originally that I would have my own committee. That I would be in charge of it, and we would do it my way and everything, and when push came to shove, when we finally did do it, it was given to an inspector to run, out of [another city] and I was told that I could be elected. Yeah but I don't know why they couldn't have just given it to civilians to run because it is for civilians.*

*It's pretty much the same. The only thing here is honestly, I don't feel probably as much stress here because of my lifestyle change, ike I'm happier. I'm exclusive you know...I don't...there is not even....and we don't have as many white shirts walking around in here.*

*Even people that drove in together from out of town, who for years have driven in together, they carpool, it's great. No sorry, we can't. Split them up because if we split them up, then we have to split those guys up too.*

*Yeah, like within the organization, as being a civilian employee essentially a second class employee within the organization, if you're a police officer then...and not to say they haven't earned, like anyone a police officer has earned that position but in this organization that make you qualified to anything. You could fly the space shuttle, for the space station. You could build a rocket, but if you're a civilian, you're not qualified to do anything in the organization. There's tons of jobs in the organization that could easily be done by anybody but the only people that they would look at are the uniform members. And as an organization, if you're a uniform member it's a great organization with plenty of opportunity. If you're a civilian employee the opportunities are far more limited. So that is an aspect that I don't like about doing this work. Oh ok, now with that said, the management creates a certain amount of negative atmosphere in my mind. The focus on rules, that don't seem to matter is what kills that. You know, the most important thing that I can do during my 12 hours of work is wear the right clothes and not eat certain foods at my desk. The work that I do isn't nearly as important as those things...*

*So the actual job itself is very stressful and when management is constantly pushing us for we didn't wear the right shoes, you didn't wear the right pants, you didn't wear the right shirt. You didn't enter this properly, you said this wrong on the phone, you had a two minute personal phone call. Like, I've been suspended for things that blow my mind, you know?*

*So they end up pulling me in for an investigation, barely tell me anything they just start dropping letters off on my desk. They start locking me out of my computer, they start you know, just like treating me as if I've murdered somebody, basically is how I felt. So then I come in the next time to work and it's like you're dressed inappropriately, you have to go home and change. So it's not like everyone else who has to go home and change or go out to their car and change, come back in and it's all over. Now what? I'm all of a sudden like elevated to...*

*I mean I don't think that who I'm dating outside of work, whether they're an employee or not should ever come into work. If it doesn't affect my actual work, like if it doesn't affect my quality of work. Like who I'm dating, doesn't affect how I'm answering the phone and it doesn't affect how I'm dispatching, so it seems like they always want to drag it in all the time. And it really should have no impact, it's none of their business.*

*I think there's other things because there's always, always secrets. You always see Sergeants and CO3s, can I talk to you in the boardroom? Whispering at their desk,*

*whispering in Sergeants' office, like there's always that dynamic going on around you. And it's probably not about you but it still makes you think like 'what did I do wrong?'*

*So I think if anything change needs to start with management. There needs to be more positive reinforcement, and there needs to be a little flexibility in the rules. [The Sergeants] are totally caught in it all. Because they're getting told from him the way to move up in the organization and get promoted is to show that you can discipline and show that you can use your authority, and then it's like they want to do that to build their file and get promoted but then it's not...it's not good.*

*And then this job, I find...I don't find it stressful, I find the odd time when I was unclassified, I found it the scheduling stressful and some of the politics and stuff but I think overall like what I compared it to, for what we got paid here, for what we did here.*

*Things I don't like... I hated being unclassified for so long and I think there was sometimes in there where you had different people in power that treated you differently. Just politics, I guess everywhere has politics, but sometimes like you know like the old boys club or whatever, like does play into effect.*

*Sometimes, do I think power and control is a big thing here? Yeah like some people come into this place and they like to be power and like to show their power.*

*Absolutely. Like I think over time like you have sometimes where there's not and then there's other times where yeah you have some people in uniforms that it's you make sure you direct me as Sergeant or Inspector or Staff Sergeant. And I get it, you earn that rank, absolutely, but come on we're all people here. Like and especially us because we're civilians, we never went through that kind of thing... I think sometimes in here I've had like a sergeant say you do what you're told, you speak when you're spoken to kinda thing. And you're kinda like ok who made you god but that's just I think part of it. Right is that you have people in control that sometimes maybe shouldn't be in control because they don't exercise their power in the right ways but anywhere you go there's going to be some kind of you know. And then you have great managers that are understandable and treat you well and treat you like an equal.*

*I've been here for six years and I just finally got full-time and I know there's been people here longer than me that haven't gotten full-time*

*So you see in our career four different Inspectors and 10 different Staff Sergeants and 30 different Sergeants. They come in and out the door because it's a revolving circle, because let's be honest, most of the people that come in, that are uniform, this is stepping stone for them so they don't really care about us, you know what I mean?... they want to change this and they wanna change that. And I get it, they're doing what they think is best for their career but I don't think a lot of people come into the comm centre to be in the comm centre. You know what I mean?*

*Yeah and I mean to each their own, but for us as civilians we're always here, like there's not really anywhere for us to go. This is where we are so you see so much change and things turn over and some people don't really...and I'm not saying all people don't come in here and don't care, but there's a lot of people who come in here are just here to like get their human resources to go on to the next position and I've never really had any huge...well I've had a couple run ins but like I think overall like I just that sometimes it's where the power and control thing...*

*There are Sergeants that walk around and look at your shoes to make sure you're complying with the dress code and to put your drinks in your spill proof cup or whatever. Like we get treated like children but you know some people in here probably do things that have made them make those policies. The frustration would be they come around and look at your shoes but they never listen to your calls, so I'm wearing the right shoes but if I put a 911 call on hold and somebody screams their last dying words nobody would notice.*

*You have uniform managers that haven't done our job, that are managing us and disciplining and stuff. And that's a bit frustrating, I mean if you went to most organizations the person who manages is somebody who has done the job and has moved up the ladder. And here that's not the case because the CO3's aren't managers. I mean they're supposed to be team leaders. They're not managers, they don't discipline. And there isn't training from them, where typically a manager should be doing those sorts of things.*

### **Predictability**

*Some days you skate through and you think at the end you can't even pick one call that would stand out to me today. And the next day you'll be like what was everybody on? Like every call was ridiculous. It happens, night shifts that are a little bit crazier, I think you gear yourself up for that a little bit more. Because somebody calling the police at three in the morning probably has an issue, whereas somebody calling at three in the afternoon, not necessarily. What do they want? An accident report, well that's easy.*

*Right for every county is going to be different, they have different types of calls and different types of officers who handle things differently and some of them are exceptionally busy. Some of them officer-wise, have quite a lot of respect for one another, and they listen so they're not asking for something when another officer just asked.*

*Yeah it helps knowing where you're going to sit ahead of time because you kind of gear up on your way in for that day right. Call taking is so different from dispatch.*

*But there's no typical day in here. The type of calls and the day is determined by the fact that you don't know what it's going to be. Everyday in dispatch you hope you send all your officers home but you might not. You have to know that going in.*

*It just comes in, it's just in your ear and it's there. And if you're busy you can't necessarily walk away afterwards, right. The next call is waiting so. Or you're dispatching and you're in the middle of it while you're hearing something horrifying. You react to that and deal with afterwards.*

*It's like I said 80% is mundane routine type of calls but it's like she pointed out I mean you come in here one day and it's relatively quiet and the next day it's just the opposite, especially in dispatch.*

*See I was doing straight call taking for a long time. I still am for the most part but I will do the odd dispatch shift if they need me and I kept saying the difference for me between...and for a lot of people is in call taking... you can be busy but it's one call at a time, it's not multitasking.*

*But that's part of the issue here, is that but because you never know what's coming. We spend our 12 hours in this state of hypervigilance, and we do that because you never know. You don't know what the radio is going to hold. Is it going to be an officer death? Is it gonna be somebody injured? Is it gonna be a pursuit? Is it going to be a call where you need to go on high alert? Is it a call coming from the public? You don't know what's coming in your ear, you can't see what it is, you don't know where it's from.*

*Comes and goes. But you know you are probably going to hit a stressful part of your day depending. See we can't....depending on what the calls are that hit your screen, that's your level of stress.*

*You're not doing one block in the same county then in the next block doing the same thing, different counties while your in call taking, you take all calls all over the region. As soon as you get yourself kind of settled in, you go okay, and I've been going on a nice little stretch where I haven't had too many crazy, crazy, things you know that's when it hits, you know exactly, you have been too comfortable for a little too long and our typical day I mean it's still involved with high risk crisis.*

*You know something that you do everyday that nobody's ever said anything to you about maybe is not policy but that day it gets brought to your attention and it kinda just sets your mood like ok. Just kinda sets you back a little bit.*

*Domestics they all are kinda the same but you never know what might happen. I've had some pretty tough calls, I'd say in the last year they've turned out to be pretty bad and you know, it's just...and you're on a call with somebody and the officers are delayed and you're on that call but you can see that their ETA is going to be 20 minutes and you know you have to stay on the phone with them to keep the officers updated, listen to that and try to make conversation and try to make light conversation. That...that's stressful. 'Cause I like to know, are you going to be there in 5 minutes or 10 minutes...2 minutes? Just let me know 'cause that alleviates my stress too.*

*I hate call taking. Just because you never know what you're going to get.*



*And then just you know waiting, you never know what you're going to get here. You know it can go from a call asking for an officer, to someone being stabbed during a robbery or a pursuit or you know massive accident or back to just someone wanting to talk about someone throwing garbage on their lawn like so. I just find you just come in with a clear mind and you never know what you're going to get or what you're going to do and then just kinda yeah...be ready for whatever's next.*

*There really isn't but that's part of the joys of the job right? Because like today wasn't much like yesterday, and tomorrow could be completely different again. For the most part the stuff that stays current, you come into work, you get settled in, you relieve whoever, you make sure everything is in place and wait for the first turd storm to hit. Which is kinda it, I guess. You wait and you're ready for something to go down that's yeah...*

*I like that it's different all the time. Every time the phone rings it's something different. The potential is for good or bad, funny or not funny...serious.*

*Yeah, I miss the radio huge so I can't wait to get back over there. Sometimes it's nice to have the switch right and a lot of people don't like the call taking side. But I like the switch, I don't like to do one thing for too long*

*I like the variety of going from dispatch to call taking once in a while for a break to change it up. I like that we have that ability.*

*I like how, like I said, every call is different.*

*There's some Comm Centers in the province, and I like this idea, they'll issue...you'll know up to two weeks, a month ahead of time where you're sitting. I like that. They haven't done this here and I've heard it said by some that it's because, well then people know where they're sitting and they may call in sick.*

*There's nothing worse than coming in here and having a bit of a headache let's say, you're not well rested, you're tired and then bang, you've got the worst seat in the house of all nights. Yeah, I'm not up for this. At least if you know ahead of time you can prepare yourself a little bit better mentally, and like I said, you know I try as much as possible to get proper rest.*

## **Release**

*But I think when we're having exchanges with each other and I go back to my life my partner is going to be like oh my you've been working, there's no need to swear like that here, you're swearing a lot, there's other adjectives.*

*I think you find times when you're just like frustrated and you probably just swear more.*

*Occasionally I've broken down, like I've cried just because it was so intense I was just like oh my god why am I crying? But it was just so intense.*

*And I curse it, like and I think it worked to vent...like a lot of us swear, that's how we release. Like aww f\*ck (whispers) you know?*

### **Support Seeking**

*I've seen psychologists and I've seen psychiatrists in the past and they usually say...and it's all very good information, and it's all very good suggestions...get a hobby. I don't have a hobby. It worries me.*

*I have had everything...from anxiety attacks to...I managed it by going to see a psychologist and trying to figure out what I was doing.*

*I've gone through EAP and I have gone to see a psychologist.*

*So just so to have somebody to say, and I am one of those ones if it's a professional that says no why don't you just use some relaxation techniques, work some things, get some sleep you will feel better. Oh okay.*

*There's our internet access. We have internet access so we can always...if it's something you're questioning or wondering or whatnot you could also do it yourself, initiate support as long as you can look up stuff.*

*I know there's EAP and I've called. I've used the EAP before.*

*So those things, I think other services, your own self-help. Like you said, what do you do to kind of desensitize yourself or make yourself feel better so...I definitely think we have the resources there, I just think sometimes people forget they are there, or they don't know about them.*

*I thought to myself like sometimes you think 'oh if I go get help it means I have a problem'. And I just think maybe you should just utilize it because maybe they will give you different insights that you don't think about or it's easier to talk to them about certain things that you wouldn't talk to someone else about. So I think we all can benefit from things like that. I don't think you can...I think awareness and talking and things like, they're that are all good things. I don't think you're going to regret it.*

### **Self Awareness**

*I'm usually pretty a calm person, kinda borderline comatose most the time, so you know I don't know, I just don't...I just kinda roll with things I think.*

*It's funny because I've been working ...this is kind of a personal thing I've been trying to regain. I wasn't coping well. In years past, I was on a very healthy diet, lots of working*

*out and exercise and soccer, gym and doing that, but for whatever reason the last two years I've just kind of no more gym, crappy eating, I'm not playing soccer anymore, my personal life is a bit chaotic, so it all seemed to go...so I'm probably more aware right now of what coping is in this job and what happens if you don't take care of yourself.*

*You know it's, but it's self awareness of when you start noticing...wait a second, okay, the pants don't fit anymore, and I'm shopping and then those pants don't fit anymore and then you start doing the...you know, and then your realizing you're getting sick or the calls that you used to be able to take okay, no problem...now you're taking them home. You are going, oh goodness. You're laying in bed, and going I can't believe that happened, I can't believe...you know and then build yourself up to go back tomorrow to do this again.*

*And it's own self-discipline I guess, right? It usually takes a relatively self-disciplined person, so there's just that moment where I said, 'Ok, enough! Get back on track, get your life in order because if you don't it's going to go right off the rails'.*

*I've never recognized it like that...but I have recognized all those symptoms but I never in the moment, I've never recognized it as saying...I don't, hope it hasn't gotten to that point that I don't...I don't think I let it get that far anymore. No.*

*I just feel like my heart rate escalating and I feel like, it's hard to explain but I almost feel like I'm growing grey hair.*

*I don't think...I think that's probably one of my weaknesses that sometimes I try to be tough and I don't listen to the signs of stress so like I don't find that I ever get that stressful but then maybe like health-wise something will happen with my health that the doctor will be like that's because of stress, and I'll be like I don't feel stressed. Like I don't think I really watch for the warning signs or whatever, I mean like not sleeping properly or not eating properly or things like that. I'm just kind of like whatever but then you know it kinda catches up on you and you're maybe sick or whatever and then...so yeah?*

*So I'm really aware right now coping was healthier eating, exercise, taking breaks for myself. Now I'm just trying to cram in you know, fiancé, three kids, a house being built, and just trying to cram everything in. I'm just now saying okay you know...you've got to survive.*

## **Self-Care**

*I like cooking and I like chopping. I mean it's rhythmic, it's focused and if I have something to work out that's a great time to just chop stuff up, or curling is what works, yeah.*

*I mean so many people are into like golfing and stuff like that but it hasn't like captivated me, I've tried it a few times and I think what's wrong with me, why don't I have any interests?*

*Spend time with the family.*

*Coping with stress is working out, like exercising, a craft or a hobby something your interested in you know? I'm trying to find something, because I can't play soccer anymore, trying to find something that I really enjoy doing.*

*You try to find something that will keep you...something different than what you do here right, but I think really your sleep, your balance, spirituality is a big one for me too.*

*Like today my kids are at daycare, even though I only work until 2 o'clock the kids are at daycare, so I get a little bit of time to catch up on my sleep, and then get some stuff done. So just make time for myself so...*

*I have played music. I'm a DJ. I play some weddings, and just fun stuff so just I go out maybe once a month and I'll do that, or I'll do benefits or something...and but just keeping on top of the music and keeping my music collection kinda stored...that's a big thing for me.*

*It would be nice if there was more information or more kinda in-service stuff available for...I'd like to know more about like nutrition, fitness, I mean I've had gym memberships and all the rest of it. I haven't been able to work-out for over a year or so now I've got to start back at it and I've gained 30 pounds.*

*I think for workplace stress I do alright managing that, yeah. Yeah, I get...just having time by myself maybe watch a movie or something would be...I feel better after that usually.*

*I try to keep busy and you know go shopping, go to the States, go to the beach, go for walks. Like, I try to keep busy but it's hard.*

*But I remember now like to not take things as seriously, like to remember to take of [participant's name] first because if you're taking care of [participant's name], then you're not really a benefit to anyone. So I think definitely for myself, I try to do the eat properly, I take my dog for a walk everyday, which that to me is like totally therapeutic just walking and things like that.*

### **Self-Satisfaction**

*But, you can know that you have saved lives and that's pretty validating, and so when you take time to think about it, yeah what we're doing is important, right.*

*It's satisfying when can help somebody in a bad situation get out of it, like a domestic or a family dispute. Know that they're actually going to get help and actually gonna take it.*

*So I take meaning in that and then the obvious meaning in this job is you literally save lives, you know? Somebody calls in with a pistol to their head and you can talk them out of it. Long before an officer got there, right? You stop somebody who's in a domestic from getting assaulted way before somebody arrives to make sure that they are safe or to put a Band-Aid on it afterwards. You get that out of that happening and that hysterical person on the side of the [highway], your calm voice saying get back in your car is the difference between life and death some days.*

*And from the dispatching side of it you are making sure the right people get arrested by giving back the right details and there's satisfaction in having a day that's insanely busy and knowing that you kept up with.*

*I think no matter what, for me personally, no matter what job you're doing there is meaning in the fact that you're doing it in a satisfactory manner. You're performing well.*

*No credit of course, but you had to go home and know that you made a difference or that you calmed down the situation. I think that's important, you know?*

*Well I've been doing the job to the best of my ability and going home after every shift and feeling content and satisfied, that you know, that I have crossed my 't's' and dotted my 'i's'.*

*I enjoy the work, the customer aspect. So the customer service aspect whether it's the radio side, so the officers, or the call taking side, with customers calling in.*

*You do you have a sense of helping the community, whether it's whatever the scenario may be. There is that job satisfaction. You could be caught up in a call where you actually save somebody or help save someone, and there's no greater satisfaction than to walk out of here at the end of the day saying 'geez I actually made a difference in that call.' So that would be the ultimate high highest reward.*

*So I know that it is meaningful to me because I know that because I am good and fast that I can get people help quicker by doing the job than by not doing it.*

*So stuff like that I get a lot of accomplishment out of, and I feel really good about. But on the other hand I know that I solved that case for them, that they would have been running around for days.*

*You can feel everything from being happy for helping somebody solve something really quick, from pleasing somebody on the radio, getting what they need fast.*

*So in my mind I can get those people better help than maybe somebody else could and that's how I cope.*

*I like going home at the end of the day and looking at myself in the mirror and saying good job, you did the best that you could of what you had today. It's not so much the pat on the back. They sometimes can be few and far between here so...you know you just....I like the personal satisfaction knowing that you've made a difference, that you've done the best that you can, you did your best to bring everybody home at the end of the day, and unfortunately, we have had deaths here.*

*And number one priority, I mean I still enjoy coming in and making a difference if I didn't...no pay cheque is worth coming in, right?*

*I genuinely care about my job and about my performance and I care about the people that call in. Like sure there's people where you think oh you know, there are moments but I generally want to help people and when you walk away from here, everyday is different, every call is different and I do feel like I'm making a difference.*

*But or if we have a hot call and there's an accident, bad accident, that we get ambulance and everything runs really smooth. Ambulance, fire, everybody's there within minutes, that's satisfying. And if you have a pursuit, and for me too if I have a really heavy call, and I look over afterwards and check out the chronology of it, because it's all about the chronology right? You don't want to have...like when someone's rambling stuff off, you want it to go right to make sense, but they're freakin' out so you're trying to take what they're saying and make it make sense for dispatcher, to give it to the officer. And when you, for me, when I look at that call after wards, if it was a tough call... I might look at them afterward and I think, yeah awesome, I'm happy with that.*

*Well I still like to believe we're a big part of the puzzle and we help people, right? Making that contact, ummm, sometimes it's not as recognized as it could be but I still recognize the importance of what we do and that's what kinda gets you through sometimes.*

*But you know what I really, I do like getting...if you can come off a call feeling like you helped somebody, even if it's...it can really, pardon the expression, it can be a real shitty situation for them but if you even just got a chance to talk them down or connect with them someway, then that's cool. I like that. That's probably it, those are the biggest ones.*

*Well I do like if you're taking, if somebody's in distress and they phone you, you are able to be, especially if they're irate or hyper or whatever. They're in this position where they're in an extremely, like in a crisis for them and if you talk calm, you are empathetic towards their situation, you can really make a difference for somebody. They're in a, this horrible crisis and then when they phone the police, this person is calm and understanding and everything, it just makes it easier on the person. So that part of the work is a positive part of the work.*

*Yeah I don't know. I guess if you do a good job, you get some satisfaction from that. Or if you're able to...there's been the odd person where if you're nice to them, and they were*

*expecting you to be an asshole, and they thank you for it. So there's some satisfaction with that.*

*Well, I think at the end of the day. I get a lot of satisfaction knowing that you are helping people.*

*So there's not a lot of enjoyment except when you can, like bring it back on yourself and be like the personal satisfaction that I'm helping you. It's not like an enjoyment because you're complaining or you have a problem. You gotta cycle it back and be like ok I'm step 1 in step 10 of helping them.*

*Well, I think it's great, to know that maybe you can't help everyone but you are their initial line of support, so you're getting them the help they need, although it's sometimes trying.*

*I hate impaired drivers. I like when we catch an impaired driver. I think it's great. I think we should know by now that you shouldn't drink and drive, look what it's caused and people still do it all the time, so I like those when we catch them.*

*That personal reward that comes from it where you know that you have made a difference, you have helped that person for even a brief moment in time.*

*I really feel like this job is something that I really excel at. I feel like I do well at multi-tasking. I do well with dealing with the public. I feel like I can develop a rapport with people that call in.*

*The officer's right in the area, bang, bang, bang, in five minutes we've got the car pulled over that's like awesome for me. I get like excited about that. Good times and it makes us look really good too, that we were there in the right place at the right time. Because probably 9 times out of 10 with those traffic complaints we're not in position.*

*Which is kinda like oh crap but...Or you know if there's a theft in progress and we get the guy right away or get the guy eventually, that is really good.*

*Besides maybe you know like a tragic incident, where maybe the person gets helped or saved that you didn't think would happen, beat the odds.*

*And this kid was, I don't know, out in the county somewhere so he said hi...this 5 year old over the radio. Then every single officer went through and they were like oh hey my name's Matt I'm up in whatever. And I mean really, how cool is that? And it's this big gruff officer doing this, and it was just like I think I almost cried. I don't think I've ever cried at work before, and like that's cool. So we can do that stuff, and that's super rewarding and satisfying*

### ***Shared Experience***

*I mean you can describe how horrifying it is to listen to somebody scream and not be able to do anything, but until you've sat and heard it, how do you connect on that level? So I think we vent a lot and we all swear like truckers.*

*I think there's some things that everybody in here people are going to say...that they are not emotional or they sort of are flat...but ask them then what they felt when they were dealing with the [missing child] case or that little girl that drowned in [name of county] this winter? Because the room is never quiet, it's always 20 conversations happening and the room goes quiet and everybody looks like they've been hit you, know? It's just you have to get past it, and you take your moment, and you take your deep breath, and you move on because you don't have a choice, and there's other things going on, and you have to deal with it but everybody reacts.*

*There's some calls you just ask them who was willing to log off [fallen officer] after he got shot? Because we came in hours and hours later, and knew that he was still on the screen, and nobody would log him off, because who's gonna log him off for the last time? Stuff like that you don't forget stuff like that.*

*I can tell people outside here, but they don't get it. They try to get it, but they can't. But somebody that's listened to something equally or more horrifying ok, yeah know? I find that to be helpful and I don't think we do enough of that here.*

*We're family, you know what? There are some people, they really affect the mood of everybody else, and that's going to be in any social environment in my estimation.*

*If I needed to talk to someone, I would probably rather go and talk to another parent who has been through the same shit, or is going through the same shit. I know that I don't have to say a word to that person, they know where I'm coming from, whereas in comparison the people here, as well intentioned as they are, and as much training as they've had, they haven't been through it, and they may not get it entirely.*

*They don't want to know that it's a reality. They don't know how to handle those kinds of things. You lose contact with a good number of people, or have you know surfaced, when they're back in town, and you say let's go for coffee and catch up but that's kind of it. But it's part of your coping, that you end up having relationships with friends you can say 'oh my gosh, you wouldn't believe what happened.'*

*You know and it's not based on that and when he has a bad call and those kind of things he knows he can come home and say...or I can say, you know...okay so then what happened? If there is something, you know, terrible about. My good days at work are somebody's misfortune, you can say oh gosh it was so busy and this happened and this happened and he's not going to...*

*But I find it's my coworkers, basically because they do the exact job that you do.*



*So I think our coworkers are definitely important and they get you, right? We all do the same job. Like I said, you come to work and you're venting about stuff that happened in your everyday life, you know? The people that work here get it. We're all A-type personalities, we're all doing the same job and we get each other so.*

*And we're all used to having conversations in here that get interrupted, and we're on to the next one. Oh where were we, oh yeah. And we pick up like an hour ago you were talking about something ok yeah and its like we're talking in the middle of conversations, just a minute because we're on the phone now, you know on to the next one. Yeah, it's just how it works.*

*It's always tough when it's something that an officer's involved in and especially an officer's death, like the whole atmosphere is just so...so down. Everybody feels it.*

*You can feel the room, you can feel the stress level whether it's...like you can pick it up. You've probably got to experience it a few times. More so over in the call taking side because everybody's feeling the same thing at the same time. But you can pick up the vibe on dispatch side too.*

*Like yeah, I mean growing up around policing my whole life, like my boyfriend's a cop, my brother in law's a cop, my dad was a cop. Like I've just been around it constantly, which isn't necessarily a good thing either (laughs).*

### **Shift-work**

*The flipside is that it is kind of tough missing Christmas every year, and looking at some of the older people here that are doing 20 years of night shifts, and flippin' all the time is maybe not going to make you age very well.*

*Obviously working weekends when your family's off, your husband's off on the weekends that sucks. When you're working holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter that sucks, and especially once you have kids, it really sucks.*

*Ummm, I don't like the shift-work, my body doesn't like it very well anymore...I'm doing...they're accommodating me right now to try and get back to work.*

*Then other times shift-work is tiring, it's you know, work 60 hours in five days, and you miss Christmases with your families, and miss Easter and you know, you miss out on weddings, and certain things.*

*And definitely I don't think that everyone gives you the things, like remember you're on shift-work, and you should do this, and you should do that, but just sometimes it's still hard to actually put it in perspective to someone else who sleeps every night at 11 and wakes up at seven, and eats three square meals and things like that. You don't really do it, even though you know you should, but you don't.*

## Sleep

*I mean I'm sure it kept me up at night for a while and it's a sound that when I think of horrifying things that's what I hear is that woman screaming.*

*I'm on straight nights. I got a doctor's note, again going back to what I've dealt with at home. I am on straight nights because straight nights are not easy either, but it's a lesser of two evils, I find rather than working the shift-work.*

*Dislikes, I don't like shift-work and the hours are long. And the blocks we work with are five-four is just brutal. Like I'm just done in... when I go home in a couple hours I go home, I'm done. And like it will take me, like I'll feel better tomorrow, but it takes awhile to get out of it and it's hard on family, right.*

*Yeah and yet I sleep well. I have an afternoon nap before the first night shift. So I wake up at my normal time, have an afternoon nap, work all night, then I sleep all day. I mean I sleep right through to 4 o'clock so it's not like I can't sleep in the daytime, I just prefer not to.*

*Outside of here, in here as well, how it can actually then impact, and turn it into, not being able to sleep. Where you're sitting and the occasional time where you have a hectic day, and one night when your lying in bed going okay, but I was doing it every night, and I was not usually one to ever have a problem sleeping. But I would lay down and get two hours sleep, two hours sleep, watching the clock and coming in trying to function through so when I really was...end up getting sick all the time.*

*Things I don't like, which are you know...having to work nights and I'm considered an Regular Part-time, so I work nine hour shifts, instead of the twelve's.*

*Ummm, yeah I guess and if I'm not getting enough sleep, like if I'm not sleeping enough, you know, and I find juggling too much I get stressed.*

*No I'm scared of that stuff, I have to take...one of the symptoms that I have is that I'm kinda wobbly, my centre of balance is off a lot and so I'll take gravol just to kinda help settle the nausea and everything, but I even take that through the day sometimes, because I have to so but at night if I'm having a tough time sleeping, oh I'll take a couple gravol to help me sleep but no, no sleep meds.*

*And I was like, I'm not sleeping.*

*It's too much, so in a typical day if I come in and I'm getting hammered for 12 hours, I can barely function when I get home. Like I just want to go to bed and I can't imagine how people here do it when they have kids because they gotta come home and play with them or bath them and get them organized for daycare in the morning. Like I don't know how people do it. I don't think I would be able to work here if I had kids.*

*I find my worst thing is sleeping, like this cycle of days/nights, days/nights I get hardly any sleep. I'm up all the time. So I think if you're like a regular sleeper it would help with your stress.*

### **Social Pressure/Stigma**

*During your shift there is nothing honestly. They'll tell you if you had a terrible call you could unplug, you could leave, you could whatever. You could, but then you're an ass hole.*

*Yes, as much as we've made progress, there's still a long way to go and that's one example right there. Automatically, if your doctor says he's under a tremendous amount of stress, he needs this...he might question that, whereas he's hard of hearing and here's the result...it's black and white. Yep, sure, no problem. And that kind of yeah know knowing the place that I'm in and knowing it's legitimate bonafide. It pisses me off. You know my case is just as serious as the other person, if not more. People drop dead of stress or whatever, so it really gets to me when I see...and not just in my case but others, but they'll ride the person just because they don't buy into it.*

*It's very, very, rare that one of us will actually walk off the floor and say I need a break. You know that there is just this pressure that is put on you, you can take everything and then just, okay and take a huge call, and then the next call will be your dog is barking, okay. You know and just be able to transition immediately over to the next...you put on a different hat. Just a moment ago you had a gun pointing in your face, and you're doing this, and the next call you get and you want to be that person who can just continue a transition seamlessly through.*

*I have no problem going to vent to somebody but in the same sense I do feel a little silly about it you know. 'Cause I feel like we should be able to handle it, you know, and I feel a little...or if somebody saw me crying in the bathroom because of a call I would feel silly you know. I'd be kind of embarrassed but then at the same time I would be like you know, it was a tough call and people would agree with me.*

*To show that there still is stigma here is people will make the snide comments, oh there're off on stress leave or something like that, so it's funny, but you'll never find anybody who's had to be off on stress leave ever making a comment so...*

*I had a few times where afterwards, after something's occurred like, something really intense and distressing happens and then the next call is like "yeah I'd like to report that my mailbox was damaged". So now you've gotta go through this call and you just can't...you sound like an idiot because you're incapable of...you're still trying to process what had just happened and if you're dispatch, you don't really get time to process anything you gotta just keep going.*

*The board's beeping you don't feel like you should take that extra five minutes, you feel like you should plug back in and take the next call like you know you don't take that*

*minute to breathe after you just kind of let it, forget about it and go on to the next thing. So maybe that's a good thing too right? You have more time to think about things and you like analyze it and start thinking about it where if you don't have time to think about you just go on to the next thing you just don't really think about it.*

*I think like we've kind of seen some of it happen over the last year that you know all of a sudden we'll all get pulled in to the boardroom, is everyone ok and things like that. But I mean and also who wants to sit in the middle of a room and be like yeah I'm not feeling great about that. Like you know what I mean? Most people are very personal so do I think there could be more focus on us? Yeah absolutely, I think it's hard and say if you wanted to walk away and you get a minute to de-stress or deep breathe, everyone would be wondering where you are so it would be very confidential anyways like, whereas in an office point of view you can kind of get away from things a little bit easier. Everyone pretty much knows where you are, and how long you've been on your break because they can see you know.*

*Yet to feel not believed when you have like an illness. It's an invisible illness right, nobody can see it. You look fine but it's an invisible illness and people just don't understand when they can't see it. They don't see that my arm's ripped off right. They can't see that I'm bloated, I can't even do up my pants from my irritable bowel, right. Like there has been days where I couldn't come to work because I was so bloated and full of gas I could barely even move or with the acid reflux.*

*Yeah and just being open to the idea that maybe we do need some debriefing after a nasty accident or something and the fact that we're included in that kinda thing now. So there's positive change that way. There's positive change just in acknowledging the fact that maybe stress is a factor, you know. And that it's not a weakness to admit you're not doing well with it, that has changed so much in the last, not gonna say a specific date, I can't think of one, but even in the last 5 or 6 years or so because it used to be looked at as just a weakness. Like if you can't take it, if you break down or you're missing time because you're not doing well or whatever by somebody else's standards, then you're weak.*

*I will add to that one thing that really irks me is there are other people who are on accommodated duties. I've never questioned it. Some of them are hard of hearing, some of them for whatever reason only do call taking and that's fine and dandy. I'm not here to judge. I get the sense that if there's a hard of hearing case vs. a stress related case...*

*I've been off health-wise and they've been nothing but supportive on this and this isn't mental health at all but this is a medical issues, they've been really helpful but I know some people that have been dealing with stress-related issues and whatnot too and they've been really good about it so I think for the most part it's recognized but it not quite as restrictive as what people used to think... Keep dialogue open I think and speak about it more often.*

## **Spirituality**

*My faith in God and everything like that, it just at times when it's been a little overwhelming or hectic or it has been terrible trying days here, just saying a prayer, saying give me strength and courage to continue doing what you've asked me to do. I have, most people here know, I think God gives everybody a gift, an opportunity to use the skills set to make a difference in peoples' lives right and this is a hard gift but he has given a gift, right, so it's kind of a you take what he has given you.*

*It is so I just look at it as a gift that I was given an opportunity and I am one of those ones that can handle it. Do I have days where I am weaker than other days? Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. I ask him to give me help and guidance, continue to do what you have asked me to do and if I am not suppose to do this anymore then tell me. Let me know.*

*I've also got, I'm not as good at it as I'd like to be, but faith is big for me too. So I'll listen to different things, I've got a couple friends who are pastors...difference sermons that they've recorded in the past and I'll listen to those.*

*Where I was at the time and he was a Christian counsellor so he talked to me about...in relation to faith. One of the things I was having trouble with was ok I just recently...I consider myself a born again Christian, so I went through the phase. I was baptized at a very young age, like as a baby, like most people did, but didn't really go to church or anything but when I came back to the church it was on my own and my ex-wife number 1. [I began seeing] a Christian counsellor so he, we talked about it and how it related. One of the things I was having the most trouble with was ok I was a recently new Christian, I've realized my sins and how bad a guy I was and now how come now I'm getting crapped on, you know? Why isn't this making sense?*

### **Team Support**

*Usually you'll have a coworker talk to you and ask here okay, or follow you out it and say yeah you all right or that was a bad one kind of thing and you know you sort of speak with them if I have a really bad call. I would want to talk to somebody about it here before I leave because I can't go home and talk about it contract wise, and the stuff that you go home with and say nobody else outta here would get it you know.*

*As a general rule, we try to look out for each other...some of us more so than others. But if I see that somebody at another consol just took a really bad call, I can see by how they're handling afterwards, I'll call the CO3 over or the Sergeant saying get them out of the room.*

*When I first started, we worked in a group of maybe five or six. Everybody I've talked to who goes back that far, every one of them said they would trade today for that tomorrow, if they could go back to that. Smaller group, I don't know what it is...maybe it's a more personal thing, today maybe it's too many people.*

*Good coworkers and being able to talk about things here, that helps a lot.*

*You have to have a good platoon for change and so that's why they do the shuffle.*

*Like we're always short on this platoon too, but we can cope well because we work so well together. That we are able to get through it and we just, everybody does their thing and helps out where they can and that's it.*

*We're lucky, you met [Name] here, our Sergeant. He is phenomenal. We've got a couple of really good Sergeants in here, you know, if you're really struggling they will do what they can to help you as far as immediate support.*

*They can be supportive, right. They really can be at the most horrible events and times. It's amazing you know, even those ones you know...it's incredible the level of support you can get from people in the most trying of times, right. And I'm sure you have had other people say that. We have had a couple of officers killed and some seriously injured and some major incidents here and it's amazing the support network that you have. They can be guidance as well because I don't know everything right. So I can ask hey, what's this or how do we do this or...Friends right, and then the friend thing kind of carries over to that personal support. My best friend works here, so the days we actually get to sit beside each other is also, you know, we can actually have conversations with each other and we have busy lives outside of here so. The co-workers do that. The example, probably big ones too, is just an example for me is you see some that you strive to be like. You strive to be that personality, that compassion, that empathy, that devotion that they have.*

*Ummm, well I know they are supports mostly, anytime I've had any issues I just call on or send an email to a friend or whatever and we'll sound off back and forth. Luckily, a couple of my friends are people who are also on the committees for immediate wellness and that sort of thing.*

*Although I'm lucky right now, I've got two sergeants that I would be ok talking with them about stuff, they're pretty solid and they don't, they treat people fairly for the most part. So that makes it easier.*

*Yeah, and as I said if you have a bunch of grumpy people and things like that, it's not going to be a good day. Or if you have someone that's pretty good, hey can you pick me up while I go to the washroom, I need a quick break. So I think we play a huge role in each other's job.*

*Yeah, I mean I think there's certain people I might pick out that you can talk to more than others. I have a few people that I'm more close with to that I will talk to and I know in here, for me anyways, that I only trust a certain amount of people because you don't want everyone to know your business and well, at least for me, I don't want everyone to know my business or this or that so...there's a few people I trust.*

*During or immediately after we could go to our Supervisor. If I was having a problem I would walk up and say hey! I have a problem and I need to like walk away or I need to talk to somebody or whatever.*

### **Teamwork**

*You know you can certainly get by here with talking to very few people but you do need to depend on your fellow employees. There are some calls where you need somebody to get an ambulance or you know, you've got eight things to do because you're dispatching and it would be super helpful if somebody could do two of them, right. You need to stay on good terms with everybody because if you're just sitting there reading and somebody's getting nailed, you know, you could at least be decent enough to be like, 'hey you need me to help you with that?'*

*Well we work as a team. Or we should be working as a team, and for the most part we do. Help each other out, so on and so forth. So if shit should hit the fan so to speak, also look out for each other and I hope I do the same in return. Because at the end of the day nobody wants to walk out of here with someone in deep crap because of some screw up. So we watch each other's back in general.*

*This is not the environment or the job to be doing if you're an individual and you can't work with a team then....we all struggle with it at times, I'm sure, but for the most part you have to make it work. It's pretty serious stuff that we deal with.*

*Newbies would look at someone like myself and think oh Veteran you know, know it all kind of a thing. But I'm just the opposite. I'm thinking, first of all, you forget right and I find it interesting with Newbies when they come in here, they've just come out of training and you'll sit with them, let's say, and they'll bring something up and you'll think 'oh geez that's an interesting way of doing it'.*

*Ummm, it's teamwork. Team environment, and a lot of 'I's' in this team (laughs). Which can make things a little bit more challenging, but in general it's good. I would not want to try to do this job and be the only one or one of two in the room. It's great because there's always somebody to help you or available to assist, and that's the nice part of it. They've got your back and that's a good thing. It's interesting, there's interesting people, challenging at times but sometimes that's challenging in a good way.*

*We help each other. We do. No matter who you are if your on a call and the shit hits the fan and you need something ...well say I've got someone who has been beaten and needed an ambulance, the girl beside me no matter who it is, what clique she's in, will help me so we do pull together when push comes to shove.*

*Well they help you get your job done, like if you're in call taking, you all have to work together as a team. If they don't do their job well, then you don't do your job well. You know if they don't ask the right questions in call taking and you're dispatching you kinda*

*have to do their work for them. Or the officers will question you, and then you have to question them about questions that weren't asked.*

*Ok I like when the turds are hittin' the turbines and everybody kinda comes together. For me it's really cool like we'll be sitting around 3 o'clock in the morning and we could be just shootin' the breeze and talking about whatever or joking and being complete idiots right? And then something will happen, and the whole, oh the whole atmosphere of the room just changes. Everybody goes from being complete goof offs to top of the line professional.*

*It is very much a team. You're always back and forth with each other...teamwork stuff. Even, like I'm in my 9<sup>th</sup> year, going to be into my 10<sup>th</sup> year shortly...well what's the date today? Yeah I'm just finishing up my 9<sup>th</sup> year. And still after that time, I'm still, you know there's days when you bounce stuff off each other. People that have been here not as long even right? Like there's some people that just grab on to things better than others.*

*Like yes, a lot of times if there's something nasty going on, coworkers can be beneficial. You can work together as a team somewhat. It's mostly an individual job though. Some would disagree with that but there's only one person doing the work at a time. Sometimes other people can step in...what other people can do...what your coworkers can do on a shift that is really beneficial is, if you're making a mistake, they can say hey did you notice this and help you avoid a mistake. And I can do that for a coworker, coworkers can do that for me. And there's where teamwork is related and comes in to play, not in actually doing the work necessarily, but in helping someone avoid making mistakes.*

*Like if the guys and girls on the road are a shift that you really like, and they like you or if they know you personally, your day is a lot easier, because you have that personal like relationship where like it's easier. They understand that you're the person behind the radio and they're a lot easier so your satisfaction goes up. If you're sitting at a console where you have like a shift that you don't necessarily mesh with, then it goes down.*

*Yeah I mean for the most part, like I said, everybody will help you if you're like 'hey can you call ambulance I'm busy?' Like, people are going to help you out.*

*I mean I think, like definitely teamwork is needed here. If there's a serious call like you know the other day we had that drowning call and the person's trying to talk to the concerned family and yes, you can do it all alone, you can link fire, you can link ambulance, or link RCC but you need four different services, so it's nice when you have your teamwork.*

*So I think definitely teamwork plays a huge role in that everyone needs to help everyone in order to get the job done, and the job done efficiently. The same thing when we have pursuits and we're going into other police services, you need to get on the phone so that person doesn't have to get on the phone, give the information to the police service and listen to what the speeds are, what direction to travel, and all that stuff from the officers.*



*This job can't be done by one person and you need to work together, the call taker and the dispatcher like so there's constant teamwork involved and I don't think...I think you really have to get along with everyone in order for the job to get done and done efficiently.*

### **Transferrable Experience**

*If I'm talking to the parents, where somebody who knows the person, what sorts of trigger should be avoided when an officer gets there? Is there something that sets this person off? And that's something I wouldn't have known to ask before but with more and more people having mental health issues, this is going to become commonplace. I find that nobody really asks that in there. I've started to do it and I've had some good results, whether the officer...well it's up to the officer, usually the officer uses his or her own judgment, but it might be good to know don't show up with the lights and sirens going because it might make things worse, or approach the person with a calm and sympathetic way.*

*Again I think of my sister, and I think oh my god just shape up, whatever. I lose...I'm just a very...I still have my customer skills there but I afterwards get frustrated and that kind of thing. You're wasting my time kind of thing so.*

*Missing children because you have kids, yeah know, your heart just races for those ones, until you hear that they've been found and stuff so.*

*When some...luckily I haven't had a dealing with, 'I've been shot' or anything but...you know, 'my father raped me'. There's nothing I can do to make that....and I know having a daughter that that little girl was going to be devastated and her whole life is pretty much ruined. She will get...like you know...get a life...that is going to follow her, her whole life.*

*Waitressing and bartending is actually surprisingly a multi-tasking, high stress, lots of things thrown at you at the same time, so I actually think it was good prep as far as a career or job. It gives you the opportunity to multi-task, memory, personal dynamics like how to interact with people. Good customer service skills.*

*A police officer that...it actually made the transition in here a lot easier than some people. Just with the knowledge that I had coming from all the training.*

*Dealing with crisis, I use to volunteer at a crisis centre as well, so policing and volunteer work at a crisis centre, and it has also made it here where it gives you effective communication, skills that gives you the opportunity to help people that are in need.*

*It's like those kinds of things brings me back to the personal. When you have a teenager calling about something right, because I had to call 911. I'm doing AR, but I'm also the only one calling to get help for her. You know, and when you get those calls, it kind of brings you back to what you have gone through and you personalize it. Those kinds of*

*things that are always dealing with children and elder abuse is another, and you know when people can do that to the weakest of the weak, which are young children or elders, it doesn't comprehend.*

*I was a dental assistant for four years before I worked here and then they go oh that's quite the switch. That job when I had my interview for [this organization], I totally correlated the fact that between those two jobs just like people are under stressful situations, you need to be able to multi-task like crazy, time management and you know have good person...people skills. So I could really correlate the two jobs. So that was a very stressful time in my life.*

*So I totally could relate to those ones definitely, having kids you can totally relate. Or abductions or people saying things to kids that are inappropriate in washrooms and stuff, and I just think about my own kids and think oh my god. But yeah definitely, I think having my own kids intensified that part of the job.*

*I had been told for a long time that I should look into it. My brother's a cop, my sister's a cop, lots of family and friends.*

*Probably, but I think it's a real mix of everything, right? Customer service stuff, all that from the sales.*

*I worked in a hospital for a little while too, switchboard and night security, so as far as emergency stuff you kinda know, and again, I was a military brat so all of that stuff was kinda...in a lot of ways it's almost like it all led me to doing this job.*

*Yeah, I had an episode not too, too long after I started, and it's one of the only times that I remember taking it home. There was a drowning at one of the provincial parks and one of the boys that drowned was the same age as my son. And I mean it bothered me at the time and everything, but I didn't think too much of it and then I started having dreams that my son was out in the water drowning. So it was, that was a tough one.*

*Well, in any job you will sometimes deal with people that aren't happy with the, whatever. Like customers that are unhappy. So any of those skills transfer over, to this job.*

*I have had other jobs in the past. Prior to this job I worked in surveillance at the casino. So they're similar in the fact that you're sitting at a desk and there you're watching surveillance monitors and here you watch the computer monitors.*

*A family friend of mine worked for the [this organization] and somehow I was just looking through the course at [local college] and saw this 911 program and thought it would be interesting.*

*I found it very emotionally draining because you built bonds with the kids and most of the kids you dealt with were in and out of the system and you know prostituting and jail and back home and then CAS and killing themselves...so stuff like that, that I found very, you*

*made connections and it was a little bit emotionally draining. It was kinda to the point you know you would do a lot of hospital trips and I worked with a lot of self-abusers and so you're kinda like an officer where you can't go home at the end of your shift. You had to take them to hospitals and fill out reports and stuff like that so your shift never really ended on time. But I really enjoyed that, it was also one of the most satisfying jobs as well as took the most out of you.*

*I think information gathering, typing, dealing with like emergency/crisis situations where you can't, you really shouldn't have feelings about it or get worked up or emotional, you need to like kinda stay calm and professional and use different voices and tones, with different callers. Like that, I did a lot of crisis management at where I worked at a group home because you know you had kids that were in crisis all the time, and lots of bipolar, personality disorders, aspergers, like lots of different things, from one extreme to the next, and you had to use different mechanisms and coping styles with them. So I found that helps definitely coming over here.*

*As well as taking the emergency telecommunications course, I think helps so much because we did a lot of role play and kind of job shadowing and stuff like that, so that helped but yeah.*

*Definitely, I think you tend to take things more personally, when it affects you. Like, when I was younger I always had this fear of someone breaking in while I was sleeping. Yeah I know weird, but I took a call once like that and my heart beat a little faster and I was like oh my god.*

*Some calls really hit home to you and just because of personal relationships or how you view things you know?*

### **Uniform Respect**

*If you're sitting at a console and you're really busy, but all the officers are talking over you and talking over each other, and it can just get really frustrating when they don't listen. So although you are happy doing what you are doing it is really frustrating because you just feel like banging your head on the desk because they are not listening, or they are asking you something when you are doing...you know, I could be dispatching an armed robbery and somebody goes can you run the person for me at a traffic stop.*

*I even had a Sergeant on the road that was phoning in all the time questioning every call I made, and I told her you make me feel like I am incapable of doing my job, and you of all people should know better, you worked with me [at another office] and worked with me here. But she was under the gun herself for not being on the radio enough, so she was questioning everything that came over the radio just to be on it more.*

*You know and you can't go over the radio and say are you not listening? Did you not hear him just ask me to call him an ambulance? But you want me to run a licence plate*

*that's parked at the side of the road? Now come on, like use your head more, kinda thing but you can't say that, so eventually you just suck it up and suck it up until you get mad.*

*Like I have a Sergeant that I have butted heads with once he...I said I needed to go home sick and he said he thought I was faking.*

*Yeah. I mean it's kind of knit picking on the dislikes, I find sometimes the officers are very demanding and they just make a request for tow and then they don't realized that you're just one person so you have to make that call, you don't have three assistants helping you. And then you got somebody else saying I need an ambulance, I need this, I need that. I need you to run three people. I need you to clear my call, I need you to do this. And they talk so fast that you can be a fast typer, but you still can't keep up with all that.*

*The officers don't come in that often. They come in the first week they're hired, they don't have a grasp of even, like 100% what's going on yet so they don't understand. I think they need to come in and even though they say they don't have the staffing on the summer weekends, they need to come in on the summer weekend... and I think they need to come in like every three or four years, not just one time.*

*From a dispatching perspective of it, it's stressful when the officers don't listen to each other. If I send somebody to a domestic where there are weapons, and the next guy is doing a traffic stop, that's a good one to let go because if you were going to a domestic you might want it to be quiet. Not that they're anywhere close to have to be responding but you just want the radio waves to be open, because only one person can talk at a time.*

### **Varying Intensities**

*It's very mundane in a lot of ways because you know 70-80% of our workload is regular run-of-the-mill loud noise complaints or you know, and it's almost robotic you just know what the steps are, but every once in a while that 20% of calls that really challenge you, gets the adrenaline flowing and in the back your mind you're thinking 'I can't mess this up because it's pretty important'.*

*You know what? It's really weird, sometimes. I'll get up and walk away but quite often you're so into it at the time and you're so just engrossed with it, you push the button or the line goes dead and especially if it's a particularly busy shift or something. What used to really, was weird to me was you'd get off the phone with somebody...say it's a domestic and they're scappin' and you're trying to keep them apart and everything and keep things calm. The phone goes dead and there's another call in your ear like that (snaps fingers) and these people are 'can I speak to so and so please?' or you know? You just come off of a life or death thing or something, the phone goes dead and then next thing you know it's like you're speaking to like whatever. It's just so weird how it goes from...0 to 60 in 3.5seconds (laughs). That's pretty weird. And I don't know.*

*I get a little bit crabby sometimes but it's...so I'll be in my chair and I'll be resting my eyes, not sleeping, because that wouldn't be allowed, but resting my eyes and a call will come into my ear and I'll go from this to (makes a straightening up noise with mouth) and to the phone and I stay in that steady state until (makes noise) ok now it rises up to whatever need level I need to meet demand of the call. Suddenly now you have my attention, and if the beep in the ear wasn't enough some people, something on the other end has now activated me to respond appropriately and that may stay with me for a little while, maybe I'll be awake for a half an hour or so and then I'll ease back into...*

*Because I get frustrated when it's really, really busy, I get frustrated. And a lot of the calls are nonsense and a lot of the calls are trying and stressful.*

*So as far as like the day, like your calls are always going to go up and down from minor to serious, like you're going to get that...get that cycle, no matter what shift you come from, and that's whether you're in dispatch or call-taking. But calls are always going to be different. They're always going to be guaranteed to have varying degrees of seriousness. And depending on what console you sit at, your job satisfaction could go up or down depending if it's a good shift you're working with.*

*Then I find that very difficult because you just, you go from taking a serious call and you're thinking about it and you're thinking did I actually ask all the right questions, did I miss anything? And two seconds later you've got a call and a totally different area of a...totally different nature and you can switch, you can switch from like that pace all day long that on the tenth hour, all of a sudden it's like oh I need a break, I can't do this I can't keep switching. Like you can do it up to a point, but then all of a sudden I, myself hit a wall. Or I'm like I can't do it anymore.*

*I guess all emotions in a day, like you can feel sad, you can feel upset, you can be frustrated, you can be happy. I think every emotion that you can possibly feel you might even feel in one shift.*

*I think you feel all kinds of things and it ranges I mean you know you get a, for me, like dog calls, and stuff like I get sad. I'm like aww that poor dog, like you know, like things like that. So I think a different range of things...like excited sometimes, you know like if you have a call that you don't think it's going very good and then all of sudden the person lives or there's a turn of events, so excited. And in the other sense like you might get sad because maybe that call that you took didn't turn out so good and someone died.*

### **Varying Workload**

*There's a lot of downtime which is actually a bit hard.*

*Double edged sword there because I love multi-tasking, I need it, I have been to see a psychologist before and he said that because I have in my head that if I am not multi-tasking, I start thinking about other things that start to bother me so the more I do the healthier I am really, the busier I am. The busier I am the happier I am.*

*Our not normal days are in the middle of winter when we are sitting with our feet up going oh gosh, and all of us are saying I hate this you know where most people would be rejoicing, yay!... You come in, sit at whatever desk and you can sit and do nothing for almost twelve hours at a time or you can sit and be hammered.*

*You have high stress incidences but your day goes by really quick.*

*It's like a rollercoaster ride. Yeah, it can be like you said, nice and everybody's just travelling around nights like this and then it's just like crazy.*

*Now that doesn't happen everyday but the negative part is having no control over your workload. Like I could come in, in the morning and be energetic and ready to do work and nothing happens. Then later in the day when I'm zapped and don't feel like doing anything, I get bombarded with like a ridiculous amount of work. Or sometimes you get bombarded for a full 12 hours, you know? It's like playing a really challenging video game or for hours and hours. At some point you're just not going to do as well. That part of it, I don't like.*

*And it's the busyness, it's the not necessarily the type of calls you're receiving or the stress of the calls, it's just the volume of work that is ridiculous and you know you can't really make mistakes, right?*

*If it's quite and I have opportunity to socialize or read stuff on the internet or whatever, occupy...I'm pretty good at occupying myself. If I came in for 12 hours and nothing happened the whole 12 hours, I'm perfectly fine with that. I can occupy myself for the entire 12 hours with no trouble.*

*When you walk out the door at the end you're just completely fried because you've just done too much at the end when you're tired.*

*In call taking you're just sitting there waiting for the beep and if it's not very many people and it's a busy day you get the beeps all day long you just hammer the calls in. Most of the calls you receive, the vast majority of calls you receive, are pointless, they mean nothing. It's just taking an order for...that large double-double. Would you like a doughnut or that? Ok. We'll send the order up. Which is fine, you can still have a little, very small amount of fun...with people. You gotta be careful.*

*No, it's not typical but it's typically very busy, especially this year because usually we can have a lot of downtime in the winter but with the winter that we had, and the storms that we had and the severity of them, it was a pretty stressful winter because the shifts were still busy. Like normally, you can go, go, go for the summer and then you get a little bit of downtime in the winter to recharge, but we didn't really get that this winter.*

*So I find that in the last couple years we've covered extra area in [county name], extra area in [county name], [county name], [town name], [county name]. We've taken on all*

*this extra area but we don't have any extra desks, or any extra people. So you have more population, you have more officers, you have more calls coming in...*

*Sometimes there's boredom.*

*But if we could get more staff too, that's maybe some of the problem, because then you have more people to cover the seats if you want to have a longer break. But staffing is huge, management and their practices and then the lunch is like the top three for me.*

*When it's not busy, sitting around here, doing nothing. Like, I was never used to that. I was always at a job where it was like if you're not working, you clean or you find something to do. So sometimes I find that, although some people love that, I get bored very easily, so I'm like give me something to do.*

*So as for workload I think one day you can be crazy busy and the next day you could do nothing. Sometimes I find that that's the worse is that I like that even balance of being busy, I don't like to sit there and hello what's going on. There's nothing to do. I guess I'm not very good at entertaining myself and I think you need to entertain yourself here.*

*So you do have a lot of similarities, but that one was more at your own pace, whereas this one you don't control the pace.*

## **Venting**

*I think we probably vent a little more than most people, so I think that's sort of part of it, and a lot to each other, because other people aren't going to understand.*

*Everybody's got a call like that, or two or three unfortunately. And I don't know if that talking with anybody...I mean like nobody will ever get that, and the way here I think to kinda help deal with that is talking to each other because everybody does have that call.*

*No, you know, I think you need to talk about it that like if I have things building up I probably talk more.*

*Because we sat down with the psychologist for an hour and a half or two hours and we talked about it, and I walked out of there, and felt like the weight of it wasn't on my shoulders anymore. So there's lots to be said for talking it out.*

*At the end of shift it's just routine if it's a particularly difficult day, then I'm reaching out to the people that I know will understand.*

*If we do get a tough call, I find I just vent to my coworkers, just oh you know this is what I just had, like I just discuss it, I'm very open that way and I feel that that helps.*

*Like I'll say, like oh gosh, I had this really tough call, and you know and just to express it to him, just so he knows I'm a little stressed about it or whatever, and he understands, and makes you feel better.*

*Yeah, yeah or just go and vent to somebody that I feel close to on the shift and just say 'wow I just had a really tough call and I feel silly saying this but just kinda stickin' with me a bit' you know? And then you just discuss it. But yeah, not very often though, do you have those ones that affect you that way, but it does happen.*

*I complained a lot to my boyfriend and I know I did, and I would go to his house and I would come home from work sometimes, and I would just cry, and he would be like 'why are you crying?' and I'd be like 'work was horrible, they were so mean to me today'. And that wasn't a good coping strategy in the end, because at the end he ended up saying I don't want to hear it anymore. So now, I'm seeing a different guy and I'm trying very hard not to bring work home necessarily and not complain about it, but then you don't really have that coping mechanism anymore.*

*I'm a venter and I can't act so people usually know exactly what I'm thinking.*

*Yeah, I think that yeah you could kinda say oh that sucked or you know or can you believe that happened to the person sitting beside you, for the most part. Most people are good, but I think you've got your 10% that are like just leave them alone.*



## **Appendix E: Themes by Code**

### Theme 1: Meaning-Focused Coping

Compassion, Transferable Experience, Financial Security, Self Satisfaction, Flexibility, Appreciation, Challenge

### Theme 2: Emotion-Focused Coping

Personal Support, Self-Care, Compartmentalize, Release, Venting, Distancing, Avoidance, Alone, Intolerance, Anxiety, Frustration, Humour, Environmental Safety/Stability, Helplessness

### Theme 3: Problem-Focused Coping

Medication, Doctor Support, Peer Support, Support Seeking, Self-Awareness, Development and Training, Physical Activity, Barriers to Self-Care

### Theme 4: Reappraisal

Cognitive Schemas, Positivity, Gratefulness, Personal Life Priorities, Spirituality, Personal Circumstance

### Theme 5: Comm Centre Culture

Accountability, Shared Experience, Morbid Humour, Teamwork, Connection and Comradery, Team Support, Cliques, Social Pressure Stigma

### Theme 6: Occupational Dimensions

Longevity, Closure, Arousal/Hypervigilance, Decompressing, Sleep, Shift-work, Negative Calls, Varying Intensities, Predictability, Varying Workload, Breaks, Control, Physical and Mental Health, Freedom

### Theme 7: Organizational Structure

Power Structure Dynamics, Inconsistencies/Instability, Forgotten/Not Heard, Uniform Respect, Organizational Support, Appropriateness of Support

## Appendix F: Ethics Approval



### THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO FACULTY OF EDUCATION

#### USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

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Review Number: 1105-4  
 Principal Investigator: Jason Brown  
 Student Name: Sarah Horsford  
 Title: *Coping: The experiences of 911 communication workers*  
 Expiry Date: May 31, 2012  
 Type: M. Ed. Thesis  
 Ethics Approval Date: June 8, 2011  
 Revision #:  
 Documents Reviewed &  
 Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information & Consent, Advertisement

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This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

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Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

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#### *2010-2011 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board*

<b>Dr. Alan Edmunds</b>	Faculty of Education (Chair)
<b>Dr. John Barnett</b>	Faculty of Education
<b>Dr. Jacqueline Specht</b>	Faculty of Education
<b>Dr. Farahnaz Faez</b>	Faculty of Education
<b>Dr. Wayne Martino</b>	Faculty of Education
<b>Dr. George Gadanidis</b>	Faculty of Education
<b>Dr. Immaculate Namukasa</b>	Faculty of Education
<b>Dr. Kari Veblen</b>	Faculty of Music
<b>Dr. Ruth Wright</b>	Faculty of Music
<b>Dr. Robert Macmillan</b>	Faculty of Education, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs & Research ( <i>ex officio</i> )
<b>Dr. Susan Rodger</b>	Faculty of Education, UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board ( <i>ex officio</i> )

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The Faculty of Education 1137 Western Rd. London, ON N6G 1G7	Karen Kueneman, Research Officer Faculty of Education Building
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Copy: Office of Research Ethics

# SARAH G. HORSFORD

## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### **EDUCATION:**

**Master of Education in Counselling Psychology** The University of Western Ontario, London, ON  
Sept 2010-Apr 2012

- Master`s Thesis: Coping: The experiences of 911Communication Workers, supervised by Jason Brown, Ph.D., C.Psych., R.S.W.

**Bachelor of Applied Arts-Behavioural Psychology** St. Lawrence College, Kingston, ON  
Sept 2004-Apr 2008

- Applied Thesis: Effectiveness of Group Cognitive-Behavioural therapy for concurrent social anxiety and addiction, supervised by Marie-Line Jobin, M.Ps.

**Bachelor of Arts -French Studies** Queen`s University, Kingston, ON  
Sept 2003-Apr 2004

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### **ACADEMIC AWARDS:**

- Canadian Graduate Scholarship-Masters valued at \$17, 500 (May 2011-Apr 2012)  
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (accepted)
  - Ontario Graduate Scholarship valued at \$15, 000 (May 2011-Apr 2012)  
Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (not accepted)
  - Western Graduate Research Scholarship valued at \$ 5, 354 (Sept 2010-Apr 2011)  
The University of Western Ontario
  - Practicum Travel Bursary valued at \$500 (Sept 2007)  
St. Lawrence College
  - Bachelor`s Program in Behavioural Psychology Entrance Bursary valued at \$1, 000 (Sept 2004)  
St. Lawrence College
  - Queen`s University Entrance Award and Entrance Honours with Merit valued at \$1, 990 (Sept 2003)  
Queen`s University
- 

### **POSTER PRESENTATIONS**

Horsford, S. G. (2008) Effectiveness of Group Cognitive-Behavioural therapy for concurrent social anxiety and addiction. Poster presented at the First Annual Behavioural Psychology Thesis Gala. St. Lawrence College, Kingston, ON

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### **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

**Research Assistant** Sept 2011- Present  
*Dr. Ron Hansen, University of Western Ontario* London, ON

**Research Assistant** Dec 2010- Sept 2011  
*Dr. Shannon Stewart, Child and Parent Resource Institute* London, ON

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**CLINICAL EXPERIENCE**

<b>Counselling Intern</b> <i>King's University College</i>	Dec 2011-Present London, ON
<b>Group Counsellor/Co-facilitator</b> <i>Changing Ways</i>	May 2011-Sept 2011 London, ON
<b>Field Placement (14 weeks)</b> <i>Dr. Christine Coubasson, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health</i>	Sept 2007-Dec 2007 Toronto, ON
<b>Youth Services Officer</b> <i>Service Canada</i>	Summer 2006-2008 Ajax, ON

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**RELATED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:**

<b>Programs Officer</b> <i>Service Canada</i>	Jan 2010- Aug 2010 Kingston, ON
<b>Autism and Behavioural Science Assistant</b> <i>St. Lawrence College</i>	May 2007-June 2007 Kingston, ON
<b>Advanced Practicum (8 weeks)</b> <i>Dr. Pamela Cooper, Robin Easey Centre</i>	Mar 2007-Apr 2007 Ottawa, ON
<b>Basic Practicum (6 weeks)</b> <i>Altona Forest Public School</i>	Nov 2005-Dec 2005 Pickering, ON
<b>Field Work</b> <i>Calvin Park Public School</i>	Sept 2005-Nov 2005 Kingston, ON

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