A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TRAINING ADDRESSING CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine if prior training in recognition and handling of stress was beneficial during a specific critical incident incurred by law enforcement officers in a field situation. The study will examine individual critical incidents that were encountered by each of the fifteen law enforcement officer participants in a field situation and how prior training received in recognition and handling of stress in a critical incident were beneficial. Law enforcement officers are exposed to critical stressors both from external and internal forces. These officers work in an atmosphere of negativity compiled with stress. The stressful experiences may induce changes in an individual’s personality who must function within this world. The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act mandated training programs on a state and local level to teach the officer to recognize and cope with stressors frequently found within their profession (Aramanto, 2003). In the U.S., approximately two-thirds of officer involved shootings result in the officer experiencing problems associated with the incident. Seven out of ten officers resigned from their law enforcement agencies as a direct result of the critical incident within seven years. The United States Department of Justice identifies that there are over seven hundred thousand police officers in the United States with an average of seventy thousand reported assaults on officers each year. Many agencies are recognizing the long-term impact on not only the officer’s health and well-being but also on that of the immediate family (Anderson, 2002). Law enforcement officers have a significantly higher level of hospitalization than the public with a premature death rate well above numerous other occupations. Twice as many officers...
commit suicide each year than die in a line of duty incident. Approximately 300 officers commit suicide compared with in the line of duty incidents (Miller, 2006).

This paper seeks to identify the advantages of training in stress recognition and management to better equip officers for traumatic critical incidents incurred in field situations.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my wife Sandra for all of her support and understanding that she provided me each and everyday, even in the toughest of times. Your encouragement inspired me to go on even when it seemed that I could not finish. Thank you, I love you.

I would also like to dedicate this paper to our son Brent. I say thank you for telling me that you knew I could do anything I wanted as long as I had the will and desire. We will see you again someday. We love and miss you very much. Gotta Hop!

I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for their support from elementary school through college and for their encouragement to pursue this dream. I love you both very much.

To all of my friends and colleagues I say thank you. Every time I had, a question or I needed some APA writing assistance you were there and I could not have done it without any of you, especially you Carla.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper involves a phenomenological study of a critical incident where a law enforcement officer experienced stress and relied on prior training to diminish the stress incurred.

Introduction to the Problem

When comparing other occupations with law enforcement, the field is identified as an especially stressful profession (Burke, 1998). However, there is an increasing understanding that most occupations incur stress (Malloy, 1984). Law enforcement officers oftentimes encounter critical incidents during their tour of duty (Zettlemoyer, 2006). Contact involving various types of traumatic or critical incidents may cause intense stress that may not only affect the officer or his agency but also the public. If these officers have not been properly trained to identify, cope and defeat this stress, the results could be potentially destructive (Zettlemoyer, 2006).

However, despite this recognition the law enforcement community did not focus on immediate formal training addressing stress as an important issue, because each individual officer handles stress in their own way (Anderson, 2002). In working with the public, law enforcement officers have learned to adapt to a wide variety of social and environmental factors that at times seem to be beyond their immediate control. Various crises and numerous traumatic experiences take a tremendous toll on an officer’s emotions even though stress in law enforcement is an expected occurrence (Anderson, 2002).
Stratton (1978) states that law enforcement stress is grouped into three themes: (a) internal stressors, which are identified by a lack of communication, favoritism, uncertain roles and shift work; (b) inherent stressors within the law enforcement profession such as feelings of danger potential for injury; and (c) external stressors, which consist of, perceived lack of public support and being portrayed in an unfavorable light. Shortage of officers, long work hours and low salary are further examples of work related stressors that law enforcement officers endure on a continual basis. The literature of Aramanto (2003), Blum (2005), and Zettlemoyer (2006) and others focuses on stressors within law enforcement that are affected by training designed to cope with the stressors inherent in the profession either internally or externally.

Background of the Study

Sheehan (2003) identifies that individual critical incidents are not the sole cause of undue stress upon law enforcement nor are the collective stressors brought on by internal, external or inherent problems. Instead, it is a culmination of all of these factors. Cumulative stress is a large factor in law enforcement illness such as heart disease and high blood pressure (Sheehan, 2003). Other areas of concern are abuse of alcohol and prescription drugs, loss of sleep, depression, anxiety, hostility as well as domestic violence issues (Anderson, 2002).

Specific training such as the SMILE Stress Management in Law Enforcement is conducted at the FBI National Academy in Quantico Virginia. The training is taught to reduce alcohol abuse, domestic violence, divorce and suicide to command staff level officers attending the National Academy (Sheehan, 2003). Understanding stress and how
to cope with its demands on the human body especially in a time of crisis are very important to survival as well as the maintaining of a positive well being. An important undertaking is to discover first when law enforcement officers encounter extreme stress reaction to the frequent stressors threatening them (Sheehan, 2003).

Reintzell (1997) psychologists have proposed and implemented treatment programs. Training programs involving crisis intervention and stress management techniques for law enforcement officers are being offered (Reintzell, 1997). Methods for reducing and coping with stress such as physical fitness, meditation, and other specially designed workshops are being utilized (Ostrov, 1986). Many state law enforcement licensing authorities now have formal stress management training in-service requirements, which provide the officer with the awareness of stress and how to recognize and cope with stress (Sheehan, 2003).

Traditional approaches to training may not be effective because many officers are reluctant to discuss their emotions with those outside of law enforcement (Della, 2004). Covering the material in a recurring dull theme to meet requirements does not fully develop an agencies most valuable resource, its people. A training regime should provide both the benefit of advanced job skills and career development. A training regime is necessary to affect change in both attitudes and practices among the learners (Della, 2004).
Law enforcement officers are confronted on a daily basis with critical incidents that elicit stressful responses (Blum, 2005). Proper training and practice in the recognition and handling of stress can provide the control for exposure to stress encountered before, during and after the critical incident. This recognition and training would then lessen the impact of possible physical and emotional damage that could be incurred (Blum, 2005). Law enforcement officers must be aware of the early warning symptoms of stress and burnout. The next step is to provide instruction in coping mechanisms and stress management (Graves, 1996). These can be achieved in several methods. In academy training, pre-employment screening and shift training before the beginning of each shift.

Training should be as realistic as possible offering practical situations that an officer should encounter on the street (Pinizzotto, 2004). If training encounters are lifelike, the officer will develop an association or recognition between potential threat and appropriate response (Pinizzotto, 2004). In-service training should further focus on specific critical incidents in the officer’s career that caused a significant amount of stress. This training should include specific scenarios in which the officer was involved recalling details of the critical incident along with feelings and or thoughts associated which took place (Pinizzotto, 2004).

In academy training, on-the-job encounters and in-service training there are numerous processes taking place. The lifelike training prepares each officer to identify the types of physiological responses that are experienced during the stressful event. The
training will further prepare the officer to react to the danger that is confronting them. The realistic training better prepares the officer to recognize the reactions they expect to feel during the stressful event. By associating these feelings with these realistic training triggers and then articulating these while in the academy training and later while on the street the officer will be better able to identify the environmental indicators that trigger impulses to act (Pinizzotto, 2004).

Courtroom testimony given by experts in the law enforcement field have stated that no matter how simple the training or how infrequent the training is given any amount of training is beneficial to a law enforcement officer to assist them (Berg, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine if prior training in the recognition and handing of stress was beneficial during a specific critical incident incurred by a law enforcement officer in a field situation. More specifically, the purpose of the study is to explore and understand how the lived critical incidents experienced by the law enforcement officers can be prepared for with training.

Research Question

The research study is designed to elicit each participant’s personal description and feelings about their individual critical incident as a law enforcement officer. How the levels of stress affected their prior training negatively, positively or with no impact at all. The main question dealing with describing the critical incident that invoked stress is followed up with questions concerning the feelings, thoughts and actions of the
participant only if the participant failed to provide and adequate description or account when recounting the lived experience.

Based on the framework the question addressed in this study were as follows:

1. Describe a critical incident in your law enforcement career that resulted in stress.

2. Did prior training provided in stress management provide any assistance in the handling of the critical incident?

3. What were the negative or significant benefits of the training?

Significance of the Study

By describing and analyzing numerous critical incidents of the law enforcement officers, the study will provide an understanding of how training in stress management is critical. In conducting research on how law enforcement officers handle stressors inherent in the profession and how these stressors impact their personal feelings and emotions is critical to officer survival both physically and mentally. While reviewing numerous journal articles that address the effects of stress on the law enforcement community by Pulley (2005), Burke (1998), and Zettlemoyer (2006) there is very little research completed identifying a critical incident that resulted in stress that was negatively or positively impacted by training.

The benefits and implications of this study are best understood when viewing the critical incident involving stress and the negative or positive impact that training provided. The results from the study will not only benefit the participant but also other officers that have experienced similar critical incident involving stress as well. The study
further benefits academy and in-service training by identifying the training as beneficial or where improvements are required. Similarly, each law enforcement agency could receive significant benefits from the study by providing training in areas that are more beneficial to the individual officer, which would result in less litigation for the agency and less of a burden on the taxpayer. Finally, the families of the officers also are benefited by the study due to the impact of recognizing and handling of the critical incident to avoid strained domestic relations ending in violence or divorce.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terminology functioned with these definitions.

*Critical Incident* is any significant emotional incident due to its force, because of its makeup or conditions in which it happens, to effect psychological difficulty in healthy individuals (Maggio, 1993).

*Critical Incident* is also described as an incident that has a stressful outcome adequate to overpower a persons ordinarily helpful coping skills (Kureczka, 1996).

*Fight or flight response* is defined as the body’s automatic inborn warning device hardwired into the human brain brought about by stress either internally or externally that prepares the body to stand and fight or flee from identifiable dangers (Sichel, 2004).

*Gender* for the purposes of this study is either male or female.

*Law Enforcement Officer* for the purposes of this study is a sworn law enforcement officer who is employed as full-time officer for municipal police department or district police department in the State of Texas.
Muscle Memory-Mental Conditioning assists an individual in preparing for a crisis before it happens and assists in coping with stress for the duration of the event and after. An individual must first intellectually understand the material and then rehearse the easily understood mental exercises repeatedly in order to enhance their mental ability (Remsberg, 1986).

Stress is a psychological or physical reaction of the body that happens when a person must adjust to ever changing circumstances, whether the conditions be real or perceived (Gore, 2004).

Training is an organizational preparation to assist employees understanding of job-related skills (Della, 2004).

Phenomenology involves the study of how a group of people understood a particular incident in their lives (Mertens, 2005).

Assumptions and Limitations

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions are made. This study seeks to investigate the relationship of a critical incident, stress and training in law enforcement officers. The study is to be carried out at two local municipal level law enforcement agencies in West Texas. Each participant in the study will provide a narrative reflection of the individual critical incident in an accurate and honest portrayal revealing an authentic reflection of his or her stressful experience. Each participant will be asked to thoroughly discuss the connection between the critical incident related stressors and the influence or lack thereof of prior training. All participants involved in the study will be asked the same questions.
Data is collected, processed and analysis strategies are performed in the studies that strengthen the validity of the outcomes by providing an accurate representation of each participant’s individual experiences. Each participant will provide information from their critical incident involving stress that prior training in the recognition and handling of stress were beneficial to the situation. The data was collected by personal interviews and audio taped interviews to minimize confusion. The completion of this study will give rise to the following limitations.

The interview and the data collected may be influenced by the presence of the researcher and the fact that the researcher has prior experience as a law enforcement officer. The study could possibly be limited by the subjectivity of the researcher. Example: the researcher has previous employment experience as a law enforcement officer experiencing numerous critical incidents that occurred in the field that were strongly associated with stress. The ability to generalize the findings of this study even though two law enforcement agencies were utilized in the State of Texas are limited due to the small number of participant’s involved in the overall study.

The data collected from the participants involved in the study may not be generalized to other police officers because it is specific only to the participants and not all law enforcement officers as a whole. The emotions and trauma caused by the critical incident may have led the participant to expand on the actual incident and not be completely honest with their responses, which may nullify the collected data and the study.
Nature of the Study

This phenomenological study examines how training addressing stress management is impacted when a law enforcement officer experiences a stressful critical incident. The study is limited in scope to two participating law enforcement agencies in West Texas. These agencies are referred to as agency A and agency B for confidentiality reasons. The fifteen participants involved in the study are active full time law enforcement officers engaged in a wide array of duties. This study will collect descriptive data utilizing a phenomenological design. The study’s intent is to collect, analyze and describe data by utilizing direct personal interviews and narratives, as well as a follow-up interview involving a specific critical incident if necessary for clarification.

This research method is suitable for this type of study because studying experiences, meanings of critical incidents, interpretations and feelings that were inherent in the specific incident were described in great detail by the participants. The 15 participants, 8 males and 7 females have experience as law enforcement officer from a rookie officer to over 30 years of service. The two law enforcement agencies serve a population of approximately 100,000 people.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

A literature review is provided to present a theoretical basis for the present study. In addition, the literature will substantiate that training is an important aspect for the proper handling of stress and related symptoms that resulted from a critical incident.
Interview questions were developed to facilitate the phenomenological inquiry of this study and assist in establishing how described critical incidents by the participant may have invoked stressors, and how these stressors were handled based on prior training. The researcher will utilize interview notes along with taped in-depth interviews to provide details in relation to the research.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two presents a review and synthesis of related literature and research. This review provides the basis for understanding the ways in which academy; pre-service, on-the-job and in-service training in stress management are effective measures when a law enforcement officer confronts a critical incident in the field that has resulted in stressors. This chapter addresses how stress is a factor in handling a critical incident and how emotions and feelings are factors that should be addressed. The chapter further identifies various critical incidents experienced in the field.

Training

Reintzell (1997), Pulley (2004), and Amaranto (2003) have identified pre-incident training at the core of success for any law enforcement officer and their agency to identify, handle and ultimately control stress resulting from critical incidents. Each agency should provide the officer with the tools necessary to arrive at a successful ending to a critical incident that has resulted in stress for the officer. A self-protection program with practical situational type training is a valuable tool for not only in teaching needed physical defense tactics, but also in assisting an individual to understand they can use fear to their advantage in a critical incident (Laur, 2002).

Fear is an emotion and human beings use emotions either positively or negatively. This works the same for a law enforcement officer in the field. When
confronted by a person of considerable size in a potentially violent situation the emotions can either cause an officer to fight or flee. If the officer properly recognizes this emotion and utilizes the emotion in a positive manner as was provided in their training it may prevent his injury, injury to others or even death (Laur, 2002).

Della (2004) identifies that law enforcement training courses should be developed specifically for adult learners. Adults learn from different venues such as role-playing and simulated activities with the instructor serving to guide the process rather than serving as a teacher. Driving simulators, firearms simulators and defensive tactics courses provide the officer with excellent training opportunities to improve their muscle memory and hone their skills for possible stressful encounters on the street. Della (2004) goes on to add that adults have a desire to be self-directed learners and resent any attempt to train them with methods utilized on children. Adults have a wealth of expertise that serves as a valuable resource to relate to new training methods and they are accommodating to learning new techniques that will serve them in their respective roles in society.

When a simulated incident replicates genuine conditions and it rewards proper actions while correcting officer’s miscues each individual will leave more equipped to handle critical incidents in the field, which translates to effective law enforcement officers. In addition, the officers are prone to other hands on types of training in the future. Simulation training in any profession is beneficial for a better understanding of how to accomplish a task. The simulation training prepares officers for numerous types of incidents while improving their overall skills (Reintzell, 1997).

Scenarios that are genuine life like training experiences will arouse the autonomic nervous system of the officer creating a link between situations and incidents that denote
threats and sub cortical responsiveness of the limbic system and their fight or flight defense mechanism. By properly recognizing these stressful situations and reacting as trained these officers are better suited to properly answer the questions associated with the articulation of a report. What happened? What did I see? What did I hear? This scenario based, in-service or on the street training prepares the officer to recognize, react and cope with these highly stressful situations in a more confident manner. In realistic training both in the academy, in-service or real experiences on the street live and up close several processes occur (Pinizzotto, 2004).

The need for critical incident training is briefly examined in several articles. Siegel (1995) identified that over several decades mental health experts have acknowledged the destructiveness of stress affecting emergency personnel. The training provided utilized peer/mental health groups in debriefing of critical incidents (Siegel, 1995). In a second related article by Siegel (1995) originating from St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in the 1950’s examined how action based training was introduced to Washington, D.C. police officers to help them effectively deal with persons exhibiting mental or emotional illness. In utilizing psychodramatic training the experiences are unrehearsed which allows for exploration, testing, peer support and debriefing of the overall mock critical incident. This avenue of training is a positive addition to critical incident training models used in numerous areas of law enforcement (Siegel, 1995).

Berg (1997) establishes that training methods used by the military, police and civilians involving lethal threats are simple, effective and easy to understand techniques. These training methods are accomplished by utilizing hands on approach. In studying past and present military history Sheehan (2004) points out the military response to
traumatic events has been helpful in developing a law enforcement model for studying critical incident stress. Simulating hypothetical specific scenarios are very effective with the skills and responses required easily recalled. Law enforcement experts provide that hands-on training and awareness will better prepare an individual to overcome stressful events experienced in the field (Berg, 1997).

The task of training in areas of safety, crisis intervention, weapons and chemical agents just to name a few, as a means to prevent or lower the incident of injury is so basic it is understood. Pre-incident training in stress recognition resulting from a critical incident and the emotional trauma that it carries with it are less instinctive yet equally as effective. These pro-active methods of training provided in Federal Law Enforcement agencies have led to the invention of a training program referred to as Inoculation Training (Maggio, 1993). Inoculation training is beneficial in reducing the effects of traumatic stress in advance by educating the employee on its impact. An important aspect of this particular method is that it appreciates the influence of each person in controlling his or her personal health (Maggio, 1993). Providing pre-incident education or proactive training as identified by Pulley (2004), Ostrov (1986), and Graves (1996) is very beneficial to the overall success and welfare of the field officer by diminishing the negative effect on law enforcement officers.

Della (2004) states, that numerous law enforcement textbooks underscore the significance of valuable training programs. Each textbook has identified training as a concentrated endeavor by the organization to facilitate employees’ understanding of occupation related proficiency requirements. In law enforcement, training is identified as one of the most important resource functions undertaken. To plan a training program the
agency should first conduct a needs assessment. This will provide avenues for the recognition and implementation of areas in need of specific training such as stress management. Implementing the training is more than just recognizing a need and implementing a familiar or easy approach. Training instead should focus on education and changing perceptions in areas of concern not meeting state mandates (Della, 2004).

Blum (2005) asserts that when a law enforcement officer experiences an unexpected threat, the brain is prone, without proper training, conditioning and preparation, to react with survival instinctive inherent responses as opposed to planned, decisive reactions based on prior training. A training regime that prepares officers for stressful incidents in real time as they are happening, scenario type training, will lower errors and injury while greatly reducing the event of civil liability from excessive force.

Blum (2005) further stated that stress exposure incident training is based on three assumptions. First, officers must be fully aware of the reactions of their brain and body under stressful conditions. Second, the law enforcement officer must be instructed how to control their stress in real situations to avoid health issues and negative reactions. Last, self-efficacy is vital to success and survival in law enforcement.

Critical Incident Stress

Mills (2004) states that certain amounts of stress were acceptable, but extreme amounts could injure the body and even the mind. The human body is wired to react to stressful events in what is called the fight or flight response. If an individual encounters a stressful event, they stand and fight, flee or freeze. This fight, flight or freeze response is an individual’s automatic inherent response from a recognized threat to survival. In a
work related stress study conducted by National Aeronautical Space Administration individuals who work with people rather than objects had a higher incidence of stress related disorders (Mills, 2004).

The unique status as emergency services personnel including paramedics, firefighters, nurses, dispatchers and police officers causes each of them to respond in a different manner to traumatic incident stress. This critical incident stress may alter an individual’s ability to perform their duties and may have negative consequences upon their personal lives. Numerous types of critical incidents that law enforcement officers as well as other emergency services personnel may encounter are automobile accidents, serious personal injury, physical assaults, homicide, sexual assault and line of duty death (Pulley, 2004).

Other types of factors associated with stress in law enforcement that may come from within an organization. These include: rotating schedules, lack of social support from friends, family and supervisors, lack of emotional availability to their spouse, a dominant home leadership style carried over from their tour of duty, and the lack of available stress reducing programs for both the officer and his family. These factors further contributed to stress upon the officer and his home life (Anderson, 2002). Critical incident stress entails our observation of a life-menacing event. It may not be the actual stressful incident that produces the stress; instead, it may be our perception of the event that causes the body to respond to stress. Most people have certain beliefs, ideals and principles as to the world and the people in it. A critical incident calls in to question those beliefs and value concerns involving the world and all the people in it (Maggio, 1993).
Law enforcement agencies are paramilitary types of organizations that have attempted to duplicate the military in several areas including rank structure, order, discipline and the handling of critical incidents. Sheehan (2004) establishes that copying a successful program from the military that has faced similar types of crises is a valuable and resourceful strategy. The crisis intervention strategy employed by not only the military but also the law enforcement community is the P.I.E Principle.

The P.I.E. Principle covers three areas of crisis intervention. First principle is proximity, which provides psychological support anywhere in the field. Second principle is immediacy, which identifies the capacity to provide prompt support. The last principle is expectancy, which identifies adverse responses to critical incidents as ordinary response to stress and not a pathological response (Sheehan, 2004).

**Coping Skills**

Coping is a very difficult process and the subject of numerous articles for approximately thirty years. Regardless of this focus dedicated to a more thorough understanding of coping there is still very little known. The coping process is very involved with many responses providing as much damage as benefit to the individual. However, even though our knowledge is limited, several hopeful trends are emerging brought out by understanding active and escapist coping (Burke, 1998).

Burke’s study identified examples of active coping skills as control, proactive, awareness and taking charge. Escapists coping skills examples are averting, evading, emotional and disturbing. Law enforcement officers that display active coping skills encounter fewer family conflicts and more professional work satisfaction than did
officers that utilized escapists coping skills. The study provided that educational training addressing coping resources could have a positive impact (Burke, 1998).

Within each individual, there is a survival mode function that kicks in when threatened, termed coping. Coping is as an individual’s self-appraisal to manage a stressful circumstance. The coping process consists of three elements. The first element is the primary appraisal, which identifies the perceived threat. The second element is the secondary appraisal, which prepares for a reaction to a threat. The last element is coping, which involves a response to the threat (Pulley, 2004).

When an individual has difficulty in separating his professional duties and emotions he performs at a lower level than normal which may in turn affect his coping skills. If an individual can understand how to handle everyday stress then they will be better equipped to cope with critical stress (Pulley, 2004). Coping or handling stress is a key to survival in the workplace, especially in law enforcement. Many officers are not able to understand that they can cope with tragedy and that assistance is available.

If an individual enjoys their profession and they are afforded a realistic amount of autonomy the long hours associated with the work should not make a person ill. The individual that is able to put aside a problem until it is actually time to address the problem are more effective in coping with stress. When a person continually reflects on a problem it causes stress and is destructive. Persons that recognized exhaustion within them and took suitable measures were able to cope very effectively with stress (Mills, 2004).

In law enforcement, providing critical incident stress management and assistance has been used for years while the beginning of such programs originated in the military
with triage on the battlefield and locating medical units closer to the action. The military discovered that the treating of physical and psychological trauma were related. Numerous critical incidents are dealt with by law enforcement and other agencies designed to handle emergencies. The Oklahoma City bombing, the attack and eventual destruction of the compound in Waco Texas, the World Trade Center attacks in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington D.C. and the crash of the plane in Pennsylvania were all massive critical incidents that law enforcement agencies faced all over the country. Many of the agencies have programs for addressing the psychological needs of the law enforcement profession (Sheehan, 2004). Several of those programs are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Critical Incident Support Groups

The Mesa Arizona Police Department utilizes a critical incident stress management team approach centered on peer support. The team members include a dispatcher, a sworn officer and the assistance of a mental health advisor. The team seeks to prevent growing stress by assisting their peers recognize the various responses associated with traumatic events. Dr. Jacob Moreno, the founder of psychodrama in Vienna originated peer support in 1913-1914. Dr. Moreno referred to the members of the group involved as therapeutic agents for one another (Siegel, 1995).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Employee Assistance Unit originated in 1993 and provides pre-incident training, assessment, triage, individual crisis intervention needs, small group intervention, psycho-educational training, family support, and religious referrals. There are 300 coordinators throughout the bureau completing
assessment, counseling, as well as referrals to employees experiencing a wide spectrum of disturbances. Another benefit offered is critical incident stress management, which, consists of a small peer-based group of employees, which occurs subsequent to exposure to a critical incident. Last is a post critical incident peer support group, which follows critical incident such as bureau agent involved shootings or mass disaster incidents. These intervention seminars are four days in duration (Sheehan, 2004).

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, which is under the direction of Department of Homeland Security, launched its Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Program in 1999. There are 8 teams, with 50 employees, who provided assistance both in the United States and abroad. The program offers pre-crisis education and inoculation training; as well as individual, team, mental health and community training; triage, assessment and follow up treatment; peer support; debriefing; traumatic stress reduction; bereavement assistance and wellness programs to assist 40,000 students from over seventy-six law enforcement agencies (Sheehan, 2004).

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms opened its Peer Support/Critical Incident Stress Management Program in 1989 due to concerns for agents involved in shootings and various other critical incidents. The program employs a critical incident stress management model, which consists of pre-incident education, assessment, peer support, large and small group crisis intervention, family assistance counseling, ministerial services, and debriefing sessions. The program is designed to serve 6,000 employees and their families and state and local law enforcement agencies. The program has four elements. They are peer responders, mental health care workers, trainers and clergy (Sheehan, 2004).
The Oklahoma City Critical Incident Workshops were a direct result of the Oklahoma City terrorist attack in 1995. The workshops utilize individual crisis intervention, group critical incident stress, family assistance counseling, education, clergy assistance and any needed follow-up care. There were over 12,384 rescue personnel involved and it was estimated that over twenty percent would require some form of psychological health care (Sheehan, 2004). There were numerous other agencies listed that now have critical incident assistance programs in place as reported by Sheehan (2004). They are Cop 2 Cop, National Fraternal Order of Police, New Jersey Attorney General’s Office and State Police, New York City: Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance, U.S. Marshals Service, U. S. Secret Service and the World Trade Center-Rescuer Support Victim. All of these programs provide valuable assistance to officers that experienced critical incident stress.

Numerous other authors have written papers concerning support groups available for critical incident stress. Anderson (2002) is the Director of the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Employee Assistance Program, which advocates numerous ideas including education in the area of stress reduction techniques. Amaranto (2003), Graves (1996) and Maggio (1993) all address assistance programs for the individual officers and the department in order to ensure proper assistance is provided in the area of critical incident stress. Their message, educate and train the officers in areas of critical incident stress and recognition before the critical incident occurs.
Mental Conditioning

Officers react to stressful situations because of their training along with repetition of the steps involved in repeating and honing of their skills. After an officer has absorbed the intellectual portion of the technique, they move on to working within the program that features the learned skill. By duplicating the learned mental exercise in much, the same manner as a person would improve their muscle performance through physical exercise (Remsberg, 1986). However, Remsberg (1986) pointed out that just reading about a skill or merely performing it once will not prepare a person to react to a situation. The skills need repetition with regularity in advance of the need for their use. This type of mental conditioning and preparedness in stressful situations is highly visible with professional and Olympic athletes as well as with soldiers of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. In Chapter Four Results, P1 remembered that she just reacted to the critical incident that presented itself to her. She could not recall what caused her to react it a she did. It may have been repetitive training in self-defense exercises that she was taught as identified in mental conditioning.

Muscle reaction or muscle memory refers to training individuals to react to a situation based on a trained muscle reaction. Examples identified involve areas such as military combat, martial arts, sports, weapons proficiency, and or learning something as simple as tying your shoes. By building muscle memory through repetitive performance of the task, individuals learn to react to a situation when they arise. According to De Noon (2005) something as simple as observing another individual execute the muscle memory or reaction technique and then repeating that learned muscle memory numerous
times, we unconsciously learn these complex skills without realizing it. Our body learns to function in a synchronized movement. In chapter 4 Results, P2 recalled that she reacted to the critical situation at hand. P2 stated that here was a direct relationship between the training, the critical incident and the positive outcomes that occurred.

Brown (1993) provides that officer training should have a heavy element of mental conditioning for without the training, chance is the main factor in influencing officer survival. Dedication to be both physically and mentally prepared rests solely with the individual officer. Any in-service courses specifically addressing defensive tactics responses or weapons training that do not provide the officer with both elements of physical and mental preparedness shortchange the officer and their respective agency (Brown, 1993). In the book, The Tactical Edge, Remsberg (1986) states officers that are adequately prepared for a violent encounter such as a shooting rely heavily, 75% on mental skill. Five percent rely on luck to defeat stress and coordinate their tactics. The other skills involved in a violent event rely on shooting skills fifteen percent and physical skill five percent.

Remsberg (1986) points out that when an officer is mentally prepared to face potential danger they are better prepared to function by being aware of their surroundings. Condition Red is at the top of the awareness chart. What looks wrong is wrong. The officer focuses on the danger and reacts to stop the threat through verbal communication, physical force or however necessary. With proper mental training and preparation, the reactions are not necessarily out of control reactions but rational reactions to a perceived threat. Mental preparedness or conditioning is accomplished by unification between your mind and your body. Your mind recognizes the stress and the
body reacts accordingly. The mind through mental conditioning and the body through repetitive training work as one addressing the stress and control an individual’s trained decision making process (Remsberg, 1986).

Remsberg (1986) states that if an officer approaches a potential violent encounter without being properly trained for the encounter mentally and physically then the officer will rely on chance or luck to get him through a situation. An untrained officer’s response to a crisis will result in strong unrestrained emotions and fragile control techniques. The officer will be overwhelmed from the critical incident. Yet, if the officer has received, proper training to prepare him mentally and physically they will be better equipped to handle the stress. Remsberg (1986) goes on to add that stress reactions occur by design in our body and that many people believe there is little to do to control your stress reaction. However, with sound training methods an individual can control their reactions to stress. The individual training to control stress involves mentally relaxing your mind and your body to diminish stress in a potential violent encounter. By exerting control over your mind, the stress is manageable and your reactions to the danger are greatly reduced thus allowing an individual to function as trained.

Remsberg (1986) states that if an officer is not mentally and physically prepared by receiving intense repeated training, they will rely on luck to save themselves. The mental thought preparation process is termed “mental movies” which prepares an officer to work on the skills for altercation they may encounter. When an officer repeatedly rehearses himself or herself defeating a threat in their mind, they have created a positive mindset that will enable the officer to defeat the real threat when encountered. The “mental movies” rehearsing involves practicing of various tactics, physical moves,
takedowns and firearms skills training your body to respond by design. These skills will minimize the seriousness of the stress on your body allowing you to function and control a situation.

Officers that mentally prepare themselves are both confident and competent in their abilities. Officers that are truly prepared for winning in every critical incident depend on mental skills for seventy-five percent, shooting skills for fifteen percent, physical skills for five percent and luck five percent. These percentages demonstrate that luck will not control an officer’s ability to survive a critical incident rather mental skills will prevail. Leading the way, mental skills provide a solid base for defeating stress by protecting yourself and winning the battle. These methods are achieved by completely understanding the technique. Then rehearsing repeatedly the mental exercise in a similar manner as a physical exercise improves an individual’s muscle capability (Remsberg, 1986).
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study relies on a qualitative design by examining a phenomenon that has occurred in the lives of participant law enforcement officers. In interviews with law enforcement officers who exposed to critical incident incidents in the field, the question posed was, did their training better prepare them for the handling of critical stressful incidents? These specific methods of data collection employed in qualitative research are quite different than those of quantitative researchers in that in that they rely on the narratives or phenomenological experience to exact themes, ideas or concerns and even attitudes from the participant to researcher (Mertens, 2005). The design employed in this phenomenological study was appropriate since the question at the center of the study addresses experiences and perceptions of a particular phenomenon.

This phenomenological study focuses on the experience of law enforcement officers and is designed to gather data from their personal critical incident in the field. The study involves interviewing and observing the law enforcement officers as they explain the particular phenomenon, as they recall the event, then interpreting the phenomenon for proper data collection. The gathering of data from personal experience is important to comprehending behavior experienced in the field. By using a phenomenological approach, the study answers the question of what is it like to experience a critical incident in the field. In a qualitative study, the researcher examines a thing or event in its natural setting in an effort to understand the meaning of the related
phenomenon to the group under study (Mertens, 2005). The design employed in this phenomenological study is appropriate since the question at the center of the study addresses experiences and perceptions of a particular phenomenon. By using a phenomenological approach in this study, the researcher utilized more open-ended questions, which are more in-depth, thus providing significantly more data for the study. According to Leedy (2005) interpreting the data permits the researcher to gain valuable understanding of the phenomenon, build upon existing concepts surrounding the phenomenon and detect any obstructions present within the phenomenon.

**Sampling Design**

The sampling design employed is probability purposive sampling. In selecting this particular design, the research method is used to illustrate the phenomenon incurred by the overall population by examining a small sample of that group (Glatthorn, 1998). Purposive sampling is a selection approach in which specific individuals or events are purposefully selected to present valuable information that cannot be obtained with other sampling designs. Purposive sampling examines individuals with unique but common qualities (Glicken, 2003), specifically critical incident stress in law enforcement.

Leedy (2005) provides that the use of phenomenological research involve the use of extended interviews with carefully selected participants with a standard sample size of five (5) to twenty-five (25) participants whom have directly experienced the particular phenomenon for study. Even though the interview process has no structure and resembles more of a friendly conversation with the participant doing, most of the talking both parties mutually seek to reach the heart of the matter or the phenomenon. The results, for
the researcher conducting qualitative research are analysis, interpretation and presentation of the findings (Patton, 1990).

The initial step in developing the sample is to identify participants that have (a) received training in the recognition and handling of stress or a similar area and (b) have experienced a critical incident in the field and that would consent to interview for this study. The next step was to conduct preliminary interviews with law enforcement officers informally, in a private place for confidentiality purposes from the two agencies in West Texas. The agencies will be identified as law enforcement agency A and law enforcement agency B. The officers will range in age from 21-51.

These interviews will begin with the letter of introduction. Officers that are willing to participate after reading the letter of introduction are provided with two copies of the Informed Consent. One copy for the officer’s records and one copy for researchers files. The next step will be to move forward to the guided questions. When the guided questions were introduced, the interviews were taped to ensure its validity and eliminate researcher bias when transcribing the data at a later point in time.

By interviewing, each law enforcement officer that will voluntarily participate in the study the researcher will confirm that each had in fact (a) received training in the recognition and handling of stress or a closely related field. In addition, (b) each had experienced a critical incident in a field situation. After conducting the preliminary interview the field of participants will consist of 8 law enforcement officers taken from law enforcement agency A and 7 from law enforcement officers from agency B. These randomly selected officers will be the first to respond to the questionnaire. The study will include 7 female officers and 8 male officers. Each participant is assigned a code.
beginning with the letter P for participant and a number beginning with the number 1. For example, the first participant when interviewed is assigned the code P1, and the second participant the code P2 and so on until the researcher interviewed the last participant, which is assigned the code P15. The coding is to ensure confidentiality. In addition, during the transcription the researcher is identified as R.

According to Leedy (2005), the practice of using human subjects in research in the field of criminology is very common. When doing so the researcher should look closely at the ethical implications involved within the study. Each participant invited to participate in the study was provided with a consent form. The consent form is then explained in detail before the participant is permitted to sign the form. Each participant is also allowed time to read the document for themselves and all question are addressed. The consent form serves several purposes including establishing the purpose for the study, procedures, possible risks and benefits, right to withdraw or refusal to answer questions as well as privacy and an area to request a summary of the results and a signature line. In addition, if any participant experiences any distress or discomfort during or after responding to questions within the study they are provided with numerous resources for assistance. Each participant is required to sign and date the consent form before beginning the interview process.

Instrumentation
John C. Flanagan (1954) developed the critical incident technique and the gathering of direct observations on which this study will be measured. It is a set of principles for the gathering of direct observations of a specific human conduct in a manner to provide information for solving practical problems. The critical incident technique defines procedures for the gathering of these direct observations of significant value and their defined criteria. Flanagan (1954) defines a critical incident as any human action that is observable and that is complete by itself to allow for conclusion, and prediction to be prepared concerning the human subject completing such an act.

Flanagan (1954) identified the critical incident technique for use in the collection of specific human behaviors in distinct situations. With that in mind, the researcher should be aware that the critical incident technique is not an inflexible method for the gathering of data, but a method that can be adapted to meet the situation that is studied. The technique includes information from qualified observers that are identified for the study by providing statements of the activity being studied. The data of the experience is important to fully understanding the critical incident and as validation of the scientific investigation.

Five steps Flanagan (1954) identified are involved in the critical incident technique process. They are (a) determine the general aims, (b) develop plans and specifications for collection of incidents, (c) collecting data through interviews (d) analyzing of the data objectively and (e) interpretation and report the incident. General aim of the study identifies what the process hopes to identify or not to identify if the study is considered a success. The general aim should be a clear concise statement of the professionals. The aim identifies the agreed upon outcomes identified by Flanagan.
Plans and specifications include clear instructions to each specific participant concerning the evaluation and classification of information. One way to achieve this goal would be to possibly acquire a copy of the report detailing the critical incident, which would include the place, the persons, the conditions, and the activity involved. Once this is identified, the researcher must then establish that the specific behavior identified by the participant is relevant to the general aim of the study either as (a) positive contribution or (b) negative contribution. The researcher should be familiar with the incident studied.

The incidents are grouped or categorized.

The third area deals with collecting of the data. Flanagan (1954), states that the collection of the data is simplified if properly planned. A necessary first element is the recording, evaluating and classification of the data provided by the participant at the time of occurrence. However, the critical incident technique can be used to collect information that can be accounted for from memory. If the reported incident is very detailed it is usually regarded as truthful while a vague report may be considered incorrect. Direct observations may well be preferred over recalling an event from memory but Flanagan (1954) points out that the effectiveness with which participants can recall incident makes their use a more practical process.

There are four means of data collection identified by Flanagan: interviews, group interviews, questionnaires, and record forms. This paragraph will focus on interviews because they will illicit the needed details surrounding the critical incident and Flanagan (1954) identified it as the most suitable means for collecting the data. In addition, this means are utilized within this study. The interview consists of the following criteria: (a)
sponsorship of the study, (b) purpose of the study, (c) the group studied, (d) the anonymity of the data, (e) the question, and (6) the conversation.

The sponsorship of the study identifies the authority of the interview. Purpose of the study simply identified what the purpose is to the participant. The group studied identified that they are part of a larger group that can report on a detail needed for the study. The anonymity of the data seeks to provide the participant with the understanding that their information will not harm anyone by providing actual techniques to be used to dispel any sense of harm. The question should state the incident or actual behavior that is studied, and ask for the most recent incident. Last, the conversation should involve allowing the participant to do most of the talking. Direction is given, if only partial details are provided. Several important conversation criteria are (a) actual conduct reported, (b) observed by the participant, (c) relevant issues provided, (d) was a judgment made regarding the critical incident, and (e) the participant has made clear the behavior involved in the critical incident.

In analyzing the data, the intention is to sum up and define the data in a manner for further practical use. The data is classified under the headings of frame of reference, category, and general behaviors (Flanagan, 1954). Frame of reference works with use of the data, ease, accuracy and classification of the data. There are no clearly defined rules for category formulation. One means of achieving the formulation of categories is by the assistance of a scholar for review of the categories to ensure they are properly classified. This may affirm your findings. Separate the sample of incidents into categories that are related to the incident being studied. Having a clear definition of each incident makes
classification less complicated. Interpreting and reporting should address the value of the results from the study as well as any limitations within the study.

Data Collection

In using face-to-face in-depth interviews as a method of collecting the data, the researcher is able to observe non-verbal keys to behavior as well explore in-depth responses to questions. All the interviews are audio taped to allow for interviewer reliability by examining the questions posed to the participants and therefore discounting researcher bias. The questions posed to each participant in the in-depth interviews should first address the question of describing the critical incident in detail including what led up to the incident, what was done that was either effective or not and the results of those actions as well as levels of stress involved and training avenues that came to mind.

As already stated the use of the critical incident technique is not a set of hard and fast rules for the collection of data, but it is a flexible set of rules that are modified to meet the specific situation at hand (Flanagan, 1954). This is important to remember in utilizing the critical incident technique. There is the initial open-ended question to start the in-depth interview process, but the participant has control over the direction of the interview from this point on. The in-depth interview process must remain flexible. The initial data should reveal levels of significance in areas of stress and training. The data may also provide insight into areas of thought and feelings.

General lists of open-ended questions posed to the participants were used throughout the interview process not to guide the interview process but to keep it on track for gathering the needed data.
1. How long have you been a law enforcement officer?

2. Have you ever been involved in a critical incident situation where there was stress?

3. Tell me about that situation

4. When the situation was occurring and you were feeling stress, did you use your prior training to control your stress?

5. What were your thoughts at that time?

6. What were you feeling during this situation?

7. Do you have anything to add?

Participant responses are followed up with questions that investigated and encouraged further explanation of important issues not fully explained.

With this initial response to the first question, the researcher will determine the types of any follow up questions if any depending on the level of response provided by the participant. This goes a long way to determining the validity and reliability of the response. If it is in-depth and full of weight, it can be assumed as reliable. If the response was full but there are areas needed for clarification the researcher may ask additional questions ensuring validity. If the initial response is not typical, lacked depth and important facts, it could reflect on validity as a whole of the participant response.

At this point, there is already an analysis of the initial data conducted by the researcher to determine if follow up questioning need conducted. The researcher is also attempting to understand similar responses among participants without controlling the interview. This also establishes reliability in the in-depth interview, data collection and data analysis section. If significant levels of stress or training issues are not addressed,
there may be a need for follow up. If the participant failed to establish or show an existence of reflective content or reflective emotion in the response there may be a need for follow up questions to the participant. The participant has addressed all these areas and each individual has completed the in depth interview process thus ensuring the collected data is complete and thorough for analysis. The in-depth interviews are recorded. The recordings can be reviewed, and follow-up contact can be made with any participant if necessary. The data is then sorted into categories. The researcher is looking for any information provided by the participant that can establish a direct result between stress management training and the handling of stress during a critical incident. This is why the in-depth interviews conducted with each participant should not have a structure nor should the researcher lead the participant. Each participant maintains control over the in-depth recorded interview process allowing for the free flow of vital data important to the study.

The participant’s information will remain confidential and their names are not released. As previously, stated participants are assigned a number and this is how they are referred to in the study. A code sheet with the assigned code numbers and each participant’s identity will be kept separately from the original materials in a locked storage cabinet only accessible by the researcher. This code sheet will be destroyed within one month of the study after the researcher has made any clarification calls that are necessary. All taping recording will also be destroyed within one month of the interview unless clarifications are necessary. All transcribed data will be typed using a computerized word processing program and will be deleted from the computer as soon as printed hard copy is made. This hard copy is maintained for a period of seven (7) years.
after the research is completed in a locked storage cabinet in the researcher’s home. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will transcribe all taped interviews with the participant’s personally. After the seven (7) year period has elapses, all written data is destroyed. During this time the researcher is the only person to have access to the storage cabinet where the hard copy data is stored.

Twelker (2003) put it best when he discussed the critical incident technique by saying that the critical incident technique is very helpful when relying on observations and the researcher does not want to expend large amounts or time or money to collect the data. The critical incident technique allows for evaluation and interpretation of the data. Even though the results may not be generalized to the overall law enforcement population the study does provide some very important data concerning training and stress management for local law enforcement.

Data Analysis

There are numerous methods available for the analysis of data utilizing qualitative research methods. These include but are not limited to phenomenology, grounded theory and inductive analysis. The function of data analysis is to sum up or explain the data elicited in a well-organized manner for practical purposes thereby increasing the value of the data (Flanagan, 1954). The researcher is looking for themes supported by patterns that emerge from the data collected in the participant interviews and field notes. By examining the data collected, patterns, words, phrases, and thoughts begin to appear and emerge. By labeling those pattern areas in each participant interview the interviewer then begins to sort and categorize the data enabling a system of classification to emerge.
Moustakas (1994) in discussing phenomenological research identifies that the emphasis of the method is to ascertain what the significance is for the participant who had the experience and are they capable of providing a comprehensive account of it. Then from that comprehensive account, a broad or collective significance is derived. Moustakas (1994) further stated that to comprehend the significance inherent in the original account provided by the participant in the context of a specific incident is the main purpose of phenomenological knowledge.

Creswell (2003) provides the following analysis of grounded theory. A central theme to grounded theory is to call upon the participants to reveal the components of the lived experience. The challenge facing the researcher is to develop a common abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of the participants in the study. Patton (1990) in discussing inductive analysis states that it is a method of analyzing the themes or patterns that surface from the data itself rather than ones that are thrust upon them before data collection or analysis.

Methods for collecting, analyzing and presenting participant data in this study are based on the phenomenological analysis approach. From the three methods previously summarized, the phenomenological approach is a sound comprehensive fit for this study. Any of the three methods would provide an avenue that would prove an effective method of analysis of the data collected. The method of analyzing phenomenological data is taken from the modified method presented by Moustakas (1994) suggested by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975). The following steps were utilized in this process.
1. Utilize a phenomenological method to gather a thorough depiction of the phenomenon.

2. Utilize the word for word transcript obtained of the incident.

3. Each participant interview is evaluated for value of the incident experienced.

4. Document all accounts dealing with the incident.

5. Complete a listing of every non-repetitive and non-overlapping statement.
   These signify the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.

6. Group these invariant units into subjects.

7. Classify the invariant meaning units and themes into a depiction of the feelings of the experience by incorporating direct information from the participants.

8. Reflect on the textural descriptions. With imaginative variation, compose a portrayal of these incidents structural description.

9. Produce a textural-structural description of the significance and existence of the experience.

10. By completing the above steps for data collection from each participant in the study, the researcher will be able to build the framework for textural-structural account and meanings of the incident, incorporating all participant textural-structural accounts into a collective explanation of the incident epitomizing the participants in their entirety.
Ethical Concerns

All participants are provided with informed consent paperwork addressing the possible hazards of talking about a stressful critical incident. The very nature of the discussion, as well as any potential risks of flashbacks or reliving the stressful critical incident or emotional trauma was discussed. If, during the interview the participant appeared to become upset or nervous the researcher would ask them if they were okay to continue, or would they like to get a drink of water or freshen up. By examining their non-verbal cues, such as wringing of hands, wetting of their lips, etc. the researcher could stop the interview or slow it down to allow them to maintain their composure.

None of these issues occurred and therefore was not an issue during any of the participant interviews. Privacy was not an issue, as all interviews were conducted in an office without a telephone. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher spoke with the participant about possible effects in dealing once again with their critical incident. All participants exited the interview exhibiting a positive well-being.

With over twenty-five (25) years of service as a peace officer and with numerous experiences with stressful critical incidents the researcher was familiar with stress. Not necessarily into each participant’s own stressful critical incident but incidents overall that elicited stress. The researcher was keenly aware that reflecting back on a previous stressful critical incident could invoke stress. By monitoring each participant during the interview process, no negative effects presented themselves during the interview process. Not a single participant required any assistance from a law enforcement related clinician as a result of the interview process that was available if needed.
All necessary inquiries were made before allowing the participant to leave the interview to ensure that there were no residual effects after having discussed their particular stressful critical incident. As stated earlier most law enforcement personnel will not willingly speak openly with non-law enforcement personnel concerning their stress. All participants clearly stated that they were not traumatized by having discussed the critical incident nor did any appear physically upset with discussing the incident in detail.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine if prior training in the recognition and handling of stress was beneficial during a specific critical incident incurred by a law enforcement officer in a field situation. By examining, the training provided the research would identify that further training is necessary to prepare an officer for a critical incident they will incur in a field situation. This chapter identifies the findings of the phenomenological research study, including the emergent themes and analysis of the data. Thorough considerations were made of all taped participant interviews as well as the researcher’s notes that accompanied each interview. To ensure that an in-depth understanding of the emergent themes in the data had materialized Dr. Roger Manning verified the themes by examining the participant interviews. By transcribing the participant interviews onto index cards, this allowed for comparison and verification as well as a broad picture of each participant’s response. Categories or themes emerged from the data after careful examination.

This chapter presents the emergent themes inherent in the data collected from participant interviews conducted in the study. In addition, this chapter seeks to identify the experiences of the participants in their own words and to provide an understanding of what training is required to better prepare officers in the field that encounter stressful critical incidents. In utilizing living participants for this study, confidentiality is crucial to ensure its success. No participant names are used only an assigned code number.
Description of the Sample

Fifteen (15) officers from two law enforcement agencies in West Texas participated in the study. All of these participants were full-time paid police officers recognized by the State of Texas. All of the participants had experience as patrol officers. Some were investigators of both persons and property crimes. In addition, several of these officers were police supervisors. These officers were the first in their respective agencies to respond to the questionnaire, Appendix A. All fifteen (15) officers participated in one on one interviews for confidentiality and privacy at a location that was not open to interruption. A consent form, appendix B, was provided to each participant in the study. The consent form provided each participant with an understanding of the parameters of the study. This allowed each participant to gather their thoughts before initiating the taped interviews. The researcher also took notes in addition to the taped interviews.

Eight male officers participated in the study with an average age of 40. The youngest male officer was twenty-seven (27) and the oldest fifty-one (51). The average years of experience for a male officer was seventeen (17), with the shortest tenure at one (1) year and the longest tenure thirty-one (31) years. Seven female officers participated in the study with an average age of thirty-nine (39). The youngest female officer was thirty (30) and the oldest forty-eight (48). The average years of experience for a female officer was eleven (11), with the shortest tenure at three (3) years and the longest tenure twenty-one (21) years.
All participants reported numerous encounters they identified as critical incidents that resulted in varying degrees of stress either from internal or external sources. The researcher had each participant select one particular critical incident that elicited stress. Each participant was assigned a code starting with the letter P for participant and a number beginning with 1 and going to 15. For example, the first person interviewed is assigned the code P1, the second participant is assigned code P2 and so on. Each participant is provided a code number in the order they were interviewed until the last interview is conducted utilizing the code P15. During the coding process, the letter R referred to the researcher.

Presentation of Results

The data collected from the participant interviews were analyzed using phenomenological analysis to discover the essence of the phenomenon through reflection on participant responses provided during the interviews. These modified methods presented by Moustakas (1994) as amended from Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975) served to direct the process of data collection and presentation. These steps are described under the Sub Heading of Data Analysis in Chapter Three. The results will focus on several areas addressed in the study. First, was there any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic. Second, identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by each participant. Third, how did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training. Fourth, is there a relationship or a link between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcome?
Participant Critical Incident & Their Responses

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 1 Case Synopsis

P1 has been a law enforcement officer for over five (5) years with experience in both patrol and criminal investigations. At the time of her stressful critical incident, she had been a patrol officer for approximately one (1) year. P1 received training in the academy about how to recognize and handle stressful days at work. She has also been involved in several debriefings after stressful critical incidents have occurred. The training attended by P1 addressed ways to relieve stress. One of which was to avoid abusing prescription medications or alcohol. The training taught P1 that there are other healthy ways to address stress. P1 recalled that several important areas are communication and exercise. P1 provided that communication is an important factor in recognizing and handling of stress in her daily experiences as a peace officer.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P1 is sent on a patrol call related to a wanted person in a local convenience store. P1 recalled that the backup officer was a long distance away when sent to the call. P1 arrived and spoke with the father of the victim, who reported that a warrant had been issued for two counts of indecency of a child against a man in the check out line inside the convenience store. After P1 confirmed that the warrants were valid, she recounted that she had no choice but to stop the wanted man by putting her hands on him as he was
leaving the convenience store. P1 maintained that they were about the same size but the male actor was considerably stronger than she was. A struggle ensued between P1 and the actor. During the struggle, P1 lost her portable radio, her only means of calling for assistance or communicating with the dispatcher or other officers sent to her location. P1 vividly recalled that the struggle went on for several minutes but it seemed like hours before any other officers arrived on scene. P1 did manage to get the actor handcuffed and restrained with the help of a concerned citizen before any backup units arrived.

P1 related that she could not recall any particular training addressing stress involving critical incidents in her academy training. P1 reflected that she was sure there was training because, as P1 recalled, it seems that it was a topic that should have been addressed. P1 experienced an extreme amount of stress during the struggle with the actor and a second time when she realized that she had blood on her hands and arms. P1 conducted an inspection for injuries and learned the blood was that of the actor. P1 went on to add that at the time she and the actor were struggling in the parking lot, several members of the actor’s family were present at the convenience store. At the same point, several members of the victim’s family kept any of the actor’s relatives from assaulting her. There are several areas of stress to consider first, the struggle itself; second, the loss of the portable radio; third, the time for backup to arrive; and finally, the blood on her hands and arms.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P1 relayed that she was sure there was training related to stress recognition because that seems like a topic that should have been addressed in her training. However,
at that moment she did not recall any specifics of the training that effectively assisted her in recognition or handling of the critical incident. P1 related that her instructors discussed how to handle things that occur throughout the day that were stressful. Examples included communicating with fellow officers involving calls such as intoxicated individuals and disturbance calls. Communication with other officers was a major theme.

After the shift was over to go home and relax without turning to the use of stimulants. Therefore, P1 concluded that her training had no effect at all on her ability to recognize and cope with her stressful critical incident.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship or a link between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcome?

In the account provided by P1 of the stressful critical incident, she recalled that she attempted to stop a male actor about her size whom was wanted for a sexual related crime as he was leaving a convenience store. The male actor had two outstanding warrants for indecency with a child. The male actor refused to submit P1’s authority to stop for the warrants. A fight ensued between P1 and the male actor. P1 believed that she was sure that there was training addressing stress during a critical incident but she could not recall any specifics of the training. P1 also provided that at the time she was fighting to prevent the male actor from escaping she did not recall any training that assisted her at all. P1 could not recall what caused her to react in the manner that she did, but did recall being taught different tactics in various areas of the academy but could not recall which areas. P1 conclusively believed that her training was beneficial but could not recall which training. Therefore, the information provided by P1 during her interview establishes that there was no direct relationship between the training she received, the critical incident
itself and the outcome of her critical incident. Even though P1 recalled that, she had received training it was not of sufficient value for her to recall which tactics were utilized in her defense during her stressful critical incident.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

**Participant 2 Case Synopsis**

P2 has been a law enforcement officer for over seven (7) years with all of her experience acquired on patrol. P2 has served as a deputy in a sheriff’s office and now as an officer with a municipal police agency. At the time of the critical incident, P2 was a patrol officer for approximately two (2) years and had handled a variety of calls for service from the public. P2 recalled there was training in the academy over dealing with stress. P2 provided in the interview that the training prepared her to react in a particular situation to dangers talked about in training, which were very helpful to her.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P2 recounted that she responded on a call reference to a fight in a bar. When she and her partner arrived, two men were exiting the bar followed closely by a bouncer. P2 recalled the bouncer pointed to the two leaving bar advising her that these were the men that were fighting earlier inside the bar. The partner chased one man into a far corner of the parking lot. P2 confronted the second man who had a considerable size advantage over her closer to the exit area of the bar. P2 attempted to question the man when the man began shoving P2 in an attempt to flee the scene. P2 and the male actor scuffled before going to the ground. P2 managed to get one arm behind the male actor’s back. As P2
struggled to get the male actor’s other arm from under his body, the same bouncer that had called her attention to the man came and assisted her. As P2 and the bouncer managed to get the actors other arm from under his stomach area, a gun slid out and across the parking lot. P2 recounted that it was apparent to her that the actor was attempting to gain control of the weapon from his waistband so he could use the weapon against P2 to prevent her from completing the arrest. P2 managed to get him handcuffed with the assistance of a male bouncer. P2 then secured the weapon in her patrol car along with the male actor. P2 related that she just reacted to protect herself when the man attempted to flee from her. P2 recounted that stress was occurring at several periods during the call. While going to the call itself, when the other actor fled the scene and was being chased by her partner, when P2 attempted to question her actor involved in the fight and when the fight ensued and the gun slid across the parking lot. P2 stated that she was also concerned for her partner who was struggling with the other suspect since that area of the parking lot was dark.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P2 recalled that since the events were occurring at such a fast pace the stress did not really hit her until after the incident was over. While the incident was occurring the only thing that was going through her mind was she had a goal to achieve and that she was going to achieve that goal. P2 recalled that no emotions came into play what so ever. P2 recounted that it was possibly, her controlling the stress, but she just reacted to the situation at hand. P2 went to add that because of some of the training that she has participated in she felt as though she was able to control her stress during the critical
incident. P2 believed that the training had a positive effect on her and greatly assisted her in handling the critical incident. P2 recalled specific hands on scenario type training related to self-defense as well as watching other officers perform techniques that greatly enhanced her ability to control her stress during the fight.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcome?

P2 recalled that the she was sent to a fight call at a bar. When P2 arrived, along with her partner, a bouncer advised her that two men that were exiting had been fighting. P2’s partner chased one man out further into the parking lot area as P2 stopped a second actor closer to the exit. P2 attempted to question the man surrounding the circumstances of the disturbance when the male actor began struggling with P2 in an attempt flee. P2 struggled with the man before taking him to the ground in an attempt to get him handcuffed. P2 was not able to get one of his arms from under his stomach to complete the handcuffing process. P2 stated that the male bouncer at the bar came to her aid and assisted her in getting the actors arm from underneath his stomach. The male actor was struggling with P2 face down in the parking lot. In the process of getting the male actor’s arm from underneath him, a gun slid from the actor’s waistband and into the parking lot. P2 reacted by securing the weapon to prevent a bystander from taking the weapon and either running off with it or discharging it at her or another person on the scene. P2 clearly stated that she believed there is a direct connection between her prior training, the critical incident itself and the positive outcome that occurred.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.
Participant 3 Case Synopsis

P3 has been in law enforcement for four (4) years with all of her experience acquired on patrol in a municipal police agency. P3 recalled that her prior academy training helped to recognize a potentially dangerous situation and react before she was injured or even killed. The training was beneficial in the areas of recognition of critical incidents that could result in injury. P3 recalled that she remembered specific training exercises related to reactions to violent encounters. P3 recounted that is what she believed she did when she reacted to a potentially violent encounter as a direct result of the prior training.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P3 was driving her patrol car in a business district of the city when she observed a man staggering away from a restaurant parking lot rounding the corner of the building. P3 recalled that the man’s staggering actions drew her attention. P3 checked out with the dispatcher advising of her location. When P3 walked around the corner of the building to investigate the man’s status she was expecting the man to be continuing in the same direction. P3 confided that was startled when she encountered the man at the corner of the building so suddenly. P3 reacted by drawing her weapon because the man was so close to her and ordered him onto the ground. Backup officers arrived and found a syringe with residue in it where the man had just given himself an injection of illicit drugs. P3 relayed that he caught her off guard because she did not expect the male to be at the corner of the building.
Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P3 maintained that her prior training helped her to recognize a potentially dangerous situation and that is why she drew her weapon and retreated as she did. P3 stated that it was a trained immediate reaction to a dangerous situation. P3 went on to add that she believed all of her training, including the basic peace officer academy training prepared her for just such a critical incident. P3 remarked that the more training officers take advantage of the better they are trained to react to protect themselves in potential violent situations that they may face every day. P3 asserted that the training had a positive effect on her and potentially saved her life.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcome?

P3 recalled that she was on patrol in a business district of the city. P3 observed a man staggering as he exited the restaurant and go around the corner of a building. P3 checked out with the dispatcher advising of her location. As P3 walked around the corner, she encountered the man suddenly startling her. P3 recounted that the man was so close she drew her weapon and ordered him to the ground. Other units were already close by and responded to assist her. When the officers inspected the area, a syringe with illicit narcotic residue was discovered close by. Upon inspection of the man, a fresh needle mark and residue were located on his forearm. P3 believed that there was a direct relationship between the training she received, the critical incident and her reaction. P3 confirmed that the training caused her to react to the potential danger in a positive manner protecting her from potential danger.
First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 4 Case Synopsis

P4 has been a law enforcement officer since 1977, with experience acquired on patrol, traffic, criminal investigations and as a supervisor. P4 recalled that at the time he attended a basic peace officer academy there was no specific training in how to recognize or control stress. There was discussion over problems you will encounter as an officer and how to handle this when it comes up, but they did not call it stress. He has however attended several in-service classes that discuss stress, critical incidents and or related areas to officer recognition and survival. At, the time of his particular stressful critical incident, P4 had been a peace officer for over 10 years and was working as a criminal Investigator.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P4 was a criminal investigator following up on a threats report taken by a patrol officer and passed on to him for follow up. P4 contacted the male actor identified by the victim and asked for a handwriting sample to compare with the letter threatening to take the life of the victim. The samples and the original letter were sent for analysis to a handwriting expert with another law enforcement agency in the area. After conducting an analysis of the samples and the threatening letter the expert confirmed that the same individual wrote them. P4 presented the facts to a magistrate requesting a warrant of arrest for the male actor. The magistrate granted the request and P4 located the male actor
and arrested him. P4 confronted the male actor with the handwriting analysis requesting a full confession. The male actor assured P4 that he did not write the letter.

While the actor was in custody, the victim received another letter threatening to take her life. P4 determined from further follow up investigation from the United States Postal Service that the victim mailed the letter to herself from a local postal facility. P4 confronted the victim in the case and she broke down telling P4 that she wrote the letters to get the male actor in more trouble. P4 went to the jail facility and released the male actor from custody. The Chief of Police then had P4 come in and explain the circumstances of the arrest and release from custody. After P4 explained in detail, what transpired including his vigorous follow up in the case he was vindicated from any negligence or willful persecution of the male actor. The Chief of Police told him to continue his hard work. P4 experienced stress in numerous areas including those of the victim, the actor, threat of wrongful arrest and the meeting with the Chief of Police.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P4 recalled that what little bit of training he had at that particular time was not effective enough to assist him in any manner. P4 recalled that he has learned how to recognize and deal with stress from working with other officers and taking bits and pieces from each of them in order to help him recognize and control critical stressful incidents that he encounters in his profession as an officer, investigator and now as a supervisor. P4 noted that from time to time the agency has in-service courses conducted by individuals that will address critical incidents that result in stress in order to assist them with their duties. However, the individual that is talking about critical incidents and stress in law
enforcement has never been an officer so P4 does put little value into what they have to say. P4 noted that he believes with the right training from an experienced trained officer he and other older officers would pay attention and learn from their information. P4 believed that the training had no effect on his ability to perform his duty during this particular critical incident. Even with that, P4 advocates more training to assist him and his fellow officers in coping with stress. P4 advocates more hands-on or scenario based types of training in order to be more effective as a law enforcement officer and supervisor.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcomes?

P4 relayed that he was conducting a follow up investigation in reference to a threatening letter to take the life of a young woman. During the investigation another peace officer from a surrounding jurisdiction who supposedly was a handwriting expert provided P4 with enough information to obtain a warrant for a male actor. P4 arrested the male actor and requested a statement. The male actor told P4 that he did not write the letter and that he would be vindicated. P4 further provided while the male actor was in custody the victim contacted him and advised that she had received another threatening letter. P4 contacted the United States Postal Service and spoke with a clerk that remembered taking the letter. The clerk provided P4 with a description of the victim in the case as the person that mailed the letter from the substation. When P4 confronted the female victim, she admitted that she had in fact sent the letters to get the male actor in trouble. P4 went to the jail facility, released the male actor, and completed a follow up report to his supervisors and the magistrate. P4 recalled that he was already under an
extreme amount of stress and then he was called to report to the Office of the Chief of Police. The Chief requested all the facts in this bizarre case. After reviewing the facts and how it was handled by P4 was told to continue the good work. P4 recounted that the entire matter was very stressful. P4 recalled his minimal training in recognizing and coping with stress was not beneficial to him at any time during his critical incident.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 5 Case Synopsis

P5 has been a law enforcement officer for three (3) years with all of her time serving the community as a patrol officer. P5 stated that there could have been training in the basic peace officer academy addressing the topic of stress but she did not recall any specifics, but was sure there was due to the nature of police work. She has however been involved in several in-service classes that address stress. She has also participated in a critical incident stress debriefing. These two areas have given her insight in how to recognize and deal with stress in both her professional and personal life.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P5 relayed that she was on a patrol shift with another officer that was experiencing thoughts of depression and suicide but the supervisors elected not to inform any of the other officers on the shift. One day when the officer experiencing depression failed to show up for duty, officers went to his home to investigate. His wife advised that she could not find him either. A massive manhunt ensued in an attempt to locate the missing officer. An entire day passed before the missing officer was ultimately located in
a field several miles away from his home. The officer had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. P5 relayed that most of the officers on the shift were in shock because none of them had any idea that the officer was experiencing depression or thoughts of suicide.

The entire shift was directed to undergo counseling with a licensed professional counselor as a group, not individually. P5 said that she knew this would not provide any assistance for her or any of the other officers because peace officers are a close group and are reluctant to speak to outsiders concerning any alleged or real problems. P5 recalled that when the shift met with counselors she and many of the other officers were very upset that the distressed officer was allowed to continue to work and carry a weapon without any of them being informed. P5 recalled that all of the officers on the shift were forced to attend mandatory counseling sessions, which, was worse than the original incident because the officers refused to talk with an outsider. P5 recalled that a number of things could have occurred most of which would have had a negative consequences for many others. P4 recalled that many officers talked among themselves and worked out the problems without the assistance of the counselors. P4 confided that she was very sorry that the distressed officer had not confided in someone that would have provided him with some assistance to solve his problem.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P5 noted that she was sure that there was instruction in the basic peace officer academy concerning stress, but she does not recall any of it helping her at that time. The critical incident stress debriefing that she attended did not assist her either. P5 stated that
she dealt with the critical incident in her own way. She talked with other officer’s one on one until she felt she had some sense of closure. P5 did not believe that the mandatory counseling required by her agency after the event with a licensed professional counselor was of any consequences as well. P5 resented being forced to go to the meetings where the counselor attempted to get all the officers on the shift to talk about their individual concerns or feelings. The officers were unwilling to talk about the effects of their fellow officers’ suicide with a total stranger. P5 believes that there should be a better effort to explain critical incident stress in the academy and through in-service classes in order to help her and other officer’s prepare for future stressful critical incident that they surely will face. P5 stated that her training in recognizing and dealing with stress had no effect at all on her when it came to this particular critical incident.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcomes?

P5 recalled a stressful critical incident that occurred where another officer on the patrol shift she was assigned to was experiencing depression and thoughts of suicide. P5 went on to say that even though the supervisors were aware of the situation they elected not to remove the officer from duty where he carried his weapon. Nor did the supervisors inform any of the other officers that worked on a daily basis with the depressed officer. One day when the depressed officer failed to report for duty a patrol unit was sent to his home to locate him. Upon their arrival, his wife advised that she was also looking for him. A manhunt began ultimately locating the depressed officer in a field several miles from his home with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to his head area. P5 recalled that she was very upset when they located the depressed officer but her sadness turned to anger
when her supervisors told the entire shift that they were aware of his suicidal thoughts and elected to allow the officer to continue working. P5 told me that she could not believe what the supervisors were telling her. Then as P5 stated to make things even worse, the entire shift was ordered by the Chief of Police to attend mandatory group counseling. P5 recalled that it did not assist her in anyway. P5 recounted that she was sure that there was training of some type addressing stressful critical incidents in her training. P5 recalled that at the time of this event none of the prior training was significant enough to assist her in addressing the stressful critical incident. P5 went onto add that the topic of stress should be addressed at length in both the basic peace officer academy as well as in-service courses throughout an officers career. In P5 opinion there was no relationship between the small training she has received, the critical incident itself and the eventual outcomes.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 6 Case Synopsis

P6 has been a law enforcement officer for over eight (8) years with experience in patrol, special weapons and tactics team, criminal investigations and narcotics. At the time of specific critical incident, P6 was a patrol officer. P6 recalled that he did receive training in the basic peace officer academy in stress management. The area of instruction addressed how to handle and control stress. How not to keep it pinned up inside you, and how not to let it get the better of you. P6 also received training in dealing with critical incidents as a member of the special weapons and tactics team. P6 was a sniper and received training in how to handle critical incidents, stress, breathing control techniques,
and how to make sense of it all in the whole picture. P6 recalled that the training in both areas is accomplished by recognition, repetition and reaction to the threat.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P6 was sent along with several other officers on call reference to a man with a sword and a rifle threatening to harm to him and others. P6 along with several other officers arrived on the scene and took up positions around the perimeter. P6 recalled that other officers were attempting to talk the man out of the house without the two weapons when he heard a single gun shot. P6 ran to the area where he had heard the shot in an attempt to verify that no one was injured. As he ran to that location officers called for him to come to the front door as they were attempting to force entry and wanted cover. Officers forced entry and located the man with the weapons lying on the floor suffering from a single gunshot wound to the upper chest area. Paramedics were called to the scene but the actor expired before they arrived. P6 experienced several areas of stress. The call itself, the waiting period around the perimeter of the house, the single gunshot and the experience of seeing another human being pass before your eyes. P6 recounted that his training was very beneficial to him but his actions relied more on instinct and reaction to a situation. As P6 affirmed this is what he was trained to do, and he did it.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P6 recalled that in the basic peace officer academy there was instruction on stress management, how to control your stress, how not to let it get to you and to not keep it all in. P6 remarked that the best training in critical incident stress came from his SWAT,
Special Weapons and Tactics team member training. P6 is a sniper member on the special weapons and tactics team. P6 reasoned that this training taught him to keep your cool when everywhere about you others are loosing control. P6 relayed several other areas that assisted him in remaining calm in the face of stressful critical incident. P6 stated that these involve training in breathing techniques, avoiding hyperventilating, controlling your emotions, how not to allow the situation to overwhelm you, how not to allow gunfire to scare you, how not to breakdown in the face of danger and how to avoid freezing up at a critical moment. P6 related that this training benefited him the most and he recommends that all officers even if they are not going to participate in SWAT training should receive the control techniques aspects in order to help them when they are faced with a critical incident in the field. P6 believed that the training had a positive effect on him and assisted him in controlling his stressful critical incident.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcomes?

P6 recalled that he was sent to a call along with several other officers in reference to a man with a sword and a rifle threatening harm to himself and others. After arriving, the officers set up a perimeter around the house to keep a close watch on the male actor with the weapons. P6 recalled hearing a single gunshot and was not sure if it was the male actor or an officer that had fired. P6 ran to the area where he believed the gunshot came from and encountered several officers that were making their way to the front of the house to gain entry. P6 relayed that the officers all looked very scared and their stress levels were shooting through the roof.
P6 relied on his prior training and remained calm and in control which, he thought may have assisted the other officers that had never been in a stressful situation such as this. P6 took up a position to cover them as they forced their way into the residence. Once inside, the officers made their way to the bedroom where the male actor had been standing brandishing the rifle and the sword. It was at that point, that the supervisor informed P6 that one of the officers had fired in self-defense due to the male actor running at him with a sword in his hands as the officer approached the bedroom window. P6 removed the weapons from the reach of the male actor as he lay bleeding from a chest wound on the bedroom floor. The male actor expired before the paramedics could arrive to provide medical care. P6 provided that his training in recognizing stressful critical incidents took over from the very start of the call. P6 was able to handle the incident because he remembered being in control. P6 said the SWAT training was very helpful. P6 recalled the training is very repetitive and it assists you in remaining in control of your senses, breathing and your adrenaline.

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First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 7 Case Synopsis

P7 has been a law enforcement officer for thirty-one (31) years with experience in patrol, traffic and criminal investigations and as a supervisor. At the time of the critical incident, P7 was a patrol officer. P7 recalled that at the time he attended the basic peace officer academy that there was not a specific area of instruction addressing stress or even critical incidents. However, one of the instructors did discuss officer mental well being.
The training included how to prepare yourself for what you could encounter each and everyday on the street and cautioned against turning to stimulants such as alcohol, drugs etc. P7 has also attended an in-service class regarding setting your stressful trigger points and it was beneficial for him personally.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P7 was off work going to a local restaurant for a bite to eat when he observed several marked patrol cars at a department store that was closed for the night. P7 recalled being told by a fellow officer, they were there in reference to an alarm and that an individual was inside. Several minutes later P7 recalled that the actor inside the department store had taken possession of several firearms and was shooting wildly at officers as he broke out of the front plate glass window of the department store. The actor fled in an alley continuing to shoot at officers and passing motorists. When the actor got to a row of cars stopped at the traffic signal at a nearby intersection, he jumped into the second car. Another officer ran up to the car as the actor aimed his stolen weapon at the driver. The officer fired hitting the actor killing him instantly thus preventing the death of the driver. P7 remembered that this was a very stressful incident. From the time, he stopped to see if his fellow officers needed assistance to the time the actor was shot and died.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P7 current assignment is in a local high school as a police supervisor. P7 has worked as a patrol officer, traffic officer, criminal investigator and as a supervisor. P7
advised that in his basic peace officer academy he could not recall a specific area of instruction where stressed was discussed. The instructor however did discuss that the experiences of the profession will not always be pleasant and possibly dangerous. P7 recalled that the group of personnel he worked closely with would discuss the circumstances surrounding what had happened among each other. There were no counselors or therapists. The gathering was just an informal group of personnel who just talked about the events of the shift to help relieve tension. P7 reported that he has also participated in a class where the instructor taught them how to recognize their trigger points or stressors.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, the critical incident and the outcomes?

P7 stated that he happened by a close department store when he observed several officers there. P7 stopped to see what was occurring when one of the officers at the scene advised that a man was inside and had taken several guns from the store display. The male actor broke out a glass window exiting the store. As the male actor was running from the scene he was shooting wildly at officers and passing motorists. The male actor ran several blocks to a traffic signal and jumped into the second car stopped for the red light. The male actor demanded for the driver to go but he could not since there was a car stopped in front of him. As the male actor pointed his stolen weapon at the driver, another officer ran up to the car and shot the male actor once in the chest killing him instantly. P7 recalled that the incident was very stressful. He did state that his training in recognizing trigger points assisted him in dealing with the critical incident.
Trigger points are areas in which you experience stress. It may not necessarily be a big critical incident such as a disturbance or persons resisting arrest but something as simple as dealing with an irate parent concerned over an event in the school concerning her child. Then when possible relax for five minutes thus causing them to relieve their stress. P7 said that he works very hard not to take his professional life home with him, and likewise to leave his personal affairs at home. Sometimes P7 relayed that this is not as easy as it sounds but when he can; it definitely has an effect on his overall stress levels throughout the day. For P7 between the instructions in the academy, the informal gatherings to discuss events from the day’s events and the trigger points class he attended the training had a positive effect. P7 did state that more classes by experienced police instructors are definitely needed for the overall profession. For P7 the training had a positive effect.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 8 Case Synopsis

P8 has been a peace officer for one (1) year serving his community as a patrol officer. P8 provided that he had received instruction in recognition and handling of stress in the basic peace officer academy. P8 also has attended courses addressing stress management and in-service courses that have included in them specific information dealing with stressful situations. P8 recalled that from the first information he received in the academy concerning stress and critical incidents and into the in-service classes, they have helped him to have a good foundation for his future encounters in law enforcement.
Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P8 was sent to a call involving the sexual assault of a young girl. P8 relayed that the girl had told her mother, friends, and other family members that her stepfather was sexually assaulting her. No one believed her. Finally, an aunt believed her and notified the police. P8 conveyed that throughout the taking of the report from the young girl he remained calm and professional. At one point during the investigation, the mother had called the stepfather to the aunt’s home in hope of embarrassing the young girl into changing her mind about filing a police report. P8 said it would have been very easy for him to take have slammed the stepfather onto the ground and injuring him for what he had done to the young girl. P8 said his training assisted him in recognizing the stressful situation and addressing that stress by focusing on assisting the young victim. P8 said that he has a young daughter and he could only imagine how the victim must have felt. P8 said the most stressful part was the fact that no one believed her story and the fact that it had been occurring since she was five or six years of age. Her story hurt him even though the entire call was stressful. P8 remarked that he was very relieved when his investigation had concluded because he could feel the tension in the house.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P8 recalled that in his basic peace officer academy there was instruction in the area of stress management. The area of instruction addressed how to recognize a stressor for you as an individual and how to cope with that stress. In addition, P8 also recalled that the area of professionalism and ethics also came out in his particular critical incident.
By that, P8 said he relied on his professional demeanor to maintain his calm in the presence of extreme amounts of stress. P8 recalled that in the academy the instructor stated that you must remain a professional at all times, not allowing your personal feeling to effect into your decision-making. P8 provided that he has also had several in-service classes dealing with handling stressful situations involving sexual assault and child abuse. P8 added that while these courses were very helpful he believes that there is a need for additional instruction as a peace officer progresses through their career. P8 recalled that the training had a positive effect on him during his particular critical incident.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical incident and the outcome?

P8 recalled going to a call in reference to a child sexual assault. P8 recounted that the entire time he was handling the call his stress levels were very high but he was able to control them due to his training. P8 relayed that the young female victim had confided in numerous family members and friends that she was being continually sexually assaulted by her step father. Yet no one believed her until she told her story to her aunt. As P8 was conducting the investigation at the aunt’s residence the mother and stepfather arrived to confront the young female victim. P8 recalled that he remained calm even though he would like to have given the father some old fashion street justice for abusing the young girl. P8 recalled that he definitely believed that his numerous training experiences adequately prepared him for the stressful critical incident. P8 went on to add that during whole ordeal he was able to recognize a stressful critical incident and rely on his prior training to assist him. Therefore, with P8 there was a valid relationship between the training, the critical incident and the outcome.
First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 9 Case Synopsis

P9 has been a law enforcement officer for nineteen (19) years with experience on patrol, criminal investigations and serving in a supervisory capacity. At present P9 is a sergeant with a school police agency. P9 stated that as far as she could recall there was not any training in her basic peace officer training specifically addressing stress. P9 has attended several in-service courses such as Active Shooter and Pursuit Driving that have sections where critical incident stress is discussed. In addition, P9’s present agency has several DVDs that she is required to watch on an annual basis that address critical incident training and recognition as well as controlling your body’s symptoms of stress.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P9 was a criminal investigator out with several other investigators looking for a wanted person that had broken into the home of an elderly couple and killed them. As the investigators were staking out an area, hoping the suspect would show up, P9 observed the male enter a home. The home owner was asked for permission to search the home for the wanted person and it was granted. P9 and other investigators entered the home searching room to room. One of the other investigators opened a closet door in the last room they were searching of the home. Inside the closet was the suspect on the floor. The suspect had a gun and he and the investigator fired their weapons at the same time. The investigator retreated into the hallway after discharging his weapon to wait on more backup units to arrive including a contingency of Special Weapons and Tactics teams.
members. Backup units, Special Weapons and Tactics, SWAT team members were called to the scene. The investigator that had fired his weapon was telling others that he thought he had shot actor and therefore the investigator was very upset. P9 took control of the situation until a supervisor arrived on scene. P9 ordered everyone to hold his or her positions and remain concealed until a supervisor and the SWAT team arrived to take control of the scene. P9 also took control of the investigator who after the incident remained in the house and was not protecting himself from any other threats. P9 escorted him with the assistance of the other officers providing cover to her vehicle and seated him in the vehicle. P9 described the investigator who had fired his weapon as very upset. It was later determined that the suspect had committed suicide and the investigator that had fired his weapon had struck the suspect in the hand. All officers involved were ordered to attend session with a psychiatrist to discuss and work out any problems they may have been experiencing. P9 provided that stress from the incident was bad but she knew how to handle it from prior training and so she reacted, as she had been trained to do. The counseling sessions were just as stressful if not more so than the actual critical incident itself, since no one wanted to discuss the incident with an outsider, the counselor.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P9’s current assignment is as a police sergeant in a local police agency. She has served as a patrol officer, a criminal investigator, K-9 officer and a school peace officer. P9 stated that instruction in stress or any type of stress management did not occur in her basic academy. P9 recalled that in Active Shooter courses that she has attended the
course instructor brings out ways to avoid tunnel vision while engaging the target, but
nothing specifically concerning stress. In Pursuit Training courses, that P9 has attended
there is training on recognizing an accelerated heart rate, your affected hearing
capabilities and the narrowing of your senses during critical incidents, but again no
specific instruction on stress management. However, all of these courses do mention that
the officer will incur stress during one of the incidents. P9 further recalled that she has
several DVD’s that the department has acquired that relate to Pursuit Training, Active
Shooter and the like where stress is mentioned during critical incidents in the field, but
again not any training specifically related to stress. P9 stated that she is well aware of
stress is and how it affects her but she has never had any formal training in this area. It
was just mentioned as something to be aware of while discussing other major subject
areas. P9 reasoned that she believes that stress and its effects should be presented more
thoroughly in the basic peace officer academy as well as throughout an officer’s career.
P9 went on to say that, most agencies encourage you to work out your body and stay
physically fit but they do not provide any assistance for their mental well-being. P9 said
that the training had no effect on her ability to perform her duties and did not believe it
assisted her during her critical incident. P9 remarked she believed all of her training
including her in-service courses were beneficial to her and provided her with the training
to adequately recognize and react to the stressful critical incident she was involved in.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical
incident and the outcome?

P9 was assisting other investigators in searching a house for a person wanted for a
double homicide. While searching the house another investigator encountered the armed
suspect in a closet. Both the investigator and the armed suspect fired weapons simultaneously. The investigator then retreated into the hallway obviously very shaken from the incident. While the remainder and the search team waited on other officers to arrive to assist in going back into the room to secure the suspect the investigator who had fired his weapon was walking around unprotected. P9 recalled that she took control of the situation and addressed the safety of the investigator involved in the shooting. With other investigators covering her she escorted the other investigator out of the house to her car. She then positioned the remainder of the search team inside the residence so they could protect themselves from harm and keep watch over the room where the shooting had taken place to observe any movements. P9 remarked to me that she just reacted to the situation as she had been trained. P9 stated that she recognized a dangerous situation and took control. P9 told me that her training however limited it may have been in the areas of stress, did assist her and she reacted to the incident and protected not only her but also the other investigators involved in the search of the house.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 10 Case Synopsis

P10 has been a peace officer for fourteen (14) years with all of his experience as a patrol officer. P10 has served with several West Texas agencies and is now currently assigned as a school peace officer. P10 stated that he did not really recall any specific training in the basic peace officer academy addressing stress or even critical incident stress. However, P10 did recall instruction in areas addressing tunnel vision, breathing techniques, and how to avoid becoming too excited during different types of
emergencies. P10 provided that he has attended in-service courses in Active Shooter and Special Weapons and Tactics Team Operations that have included in them areas that address critical incident stress.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant. P10 and another officer were sent to a call reference to someone shooting a weapon at a residence. P10 and the back-up officer arrived and found the front door to the house open. P10 and his backup officer entered the residence after calling out several times for the owner, with no response. As P10 and the other officer checked the house, P10 smelled fresh gunpowder. As P10 continued his search, he observed a female crawling on the floor in the kitchen. She had been shot once in the head. Paramedics were called to the house to provide medical assistance. P10 and his backup waited for several other officers to arrive to continue searching the remainder of the house for the actor and any other victims. Once the other officers arrived, P10 and his backup continued to search the remainder of the house. A further check of the residence found a male with a single gunshot wound to the head in the garage area. A handgun was lying close by. Paramedics arrived and transported the female to the hospital for treatment. P10 later learned that another member of the department’s parents resided at that address. P10 recalled that he could still remember hearing the clocking ticking on the wall during the time he spent talking with the female in the kitchen while waiting on the paramedics. P10 recalled that his training provided with the ability to recognize and manage the stress during and after the critical incident.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.
P10 current assignment is serving as a school peace officer. P10 has previously served as a patrol officer and as a member of a special weapons and tactics team. P10 stated he was not sure if stress or stress management were addressed in the basic peace officer academy or not. However, there was some training on how to avoid tunnel vision and how to control your emotions when responding to all types of calls. P10 has attended several special weapons and tactics courses that discuss how to control your breathing, your emotions and such while experiencing stress during a callout. P10 recounted that he has also attended courses in conducting building searches and Active Shooter courses that both address stress during the critical incident. P10 remarked that the training he has been afforded has made him feel very comfortable when confronted with stress during all types of situations. P10 stated that the training provided a positive effect on his ability to control stress during the critical incident.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical incident and outcomes?

P10 recalled being sent to a residence after neighbors had heard gunshots. When P10 and the backup officer arrived on scene the front door was standing open. As P10 and the backup officer searched the house, they found a woman who had been shot once in the head area crawling on the kitchen floor. Other officers were summoned to the house. After the other officers arrived, P10 and his backup searched the remainder of the house and discovered a man in the garage also shot in the head. His handgun was laying close by. P10 related that he has received training in numerous areas but his Special Weapons and Tactics Team training along with the Active Shooter course seemed to provide him with adequate training to assist him in addressing the stress encountered
from this particular critical incident. P10 added that the level of training he participated in is very repetitious with numerous hands on exercises that assisted him very well during this encounter.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incident or a closely related topic.

Participant 11 Case Synopsis

P11 has been a peace officer for nineteen years (19) with experience in patrol and criminal investigations. P11 advised that she did not recall any specific instruction in the basic peace officer academy that addressed stress or handling of critical incidents. P11 did however remember instructors discussing how to deal with health issues surrounding calls that they will answer each and everyday. The instructors discussed an officer’s personal well-being in areas of alcohol abuse, misuse of prescription drugs and how this places stress on your body both, mentally and physically. P11 has attended several in-service courses that have in them areas dealing with stress such as Active Shooter and Pursuit Driving Courses.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P11 is a school peace officer on a middle school campus. P11 provided that some days are very hectic and this particular day was one of those. P11 was advised over her mobile radio of three fights occurring in three different areas of the school and all three were demanding immediate attention. It immediately caused her to experience an extreme amount of stress. P11 said she was experiencing stress from several avenues, the fights themselves, each school administrator, and later from the parents of the students that she
issued citations too. After she handled all three fights and then fielded calls from the principals, other school officials and concerned parents things began to return to some form of normalcy. P11 believed that most of the time she does not experience stress to this extent but with three critical incidents occurring at the same time, she experienced an overload. P11 remarked that she reacts to situations and is able to control her stress levels on a regular basis. P11 did not recall any specific training or parts of her training that provided her with the assistance to face each of the three incidents without overloading her to the point where she could have lost control. As P11 recalled she reacted to what was called for in this particular situation.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P11 current assignment is as a school peace officer. P11 has served as a patrol officer and a criminal investigator. P11 stated that did not recall any training in her basic peace officer academy specifically addressing stress or stress management. There was instruction in understanding the pressure that officers experience everyday. To avoid using alcohol, due to the high rate of alcohol abuse in the law enforcement profession. P11 recalled that the area of stress was not covered as a specialized area of instruction. Many instructors did bring out in their course offerings that officers should be able to cope with their feelings and emotions by not showing them to the public or even other officers. Keep yourself and your emotions under control. These emotions should be private. P11 is aware after her years of experience that this is not possible at times depending upon the seriousness of her stress. P11 believes that more training is required throughout an officer’s career to help them cope with the many problems associated with
stress. P11 said that the training had no effect on her at all during this particular stressful critical incident. P11 believed that this was due to how ineffective the training was for her.

Step Four: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical incident and the outcome?

P11 was advised over her mobile radio of three separate fights in three locations at the school where she is employed as a school peace officer. Each school administrator insisted that she handle his or her problem first before it escalated to an uncontrollable point. P11 recalled that she was experiencing an extreme amount of stress as she addressed each of these fights. After handling the calls and their aftermath, P11 recalled that things returned to normal for her. According to P11, there was no specific training addressing stress in her basic peace officer academy but several instructors in their course offering did discuss pressures of the job from answering calls such as disturbances. P11 went onto say that she has attended an Active Shooter course and stressful incidents were discussed within the course. However, P11 remarked that she did not feel that any training that she has received in her career was beneficial in assisting her with the critical incident that day.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incident or a closely related topic.

Participant 12 Case Synopsis

P12 has been a law enforcement officer for twenty-one (21) years with all of her experience coming as a school peace officer. P12 provided that in her basic peace officer academy she really did not recall any specific instruction relating to stress. However, the
instructor did address issues such as staying calm in the face of danger, keep your thoughts together and to stay focused. P12 did advise that an in-service course, Active Shooter, addressed critical incident stress in detail.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P12 is a school peace officer assigned in a middle school campus. P12 recalled that on this particular day she was speaking with the principal in the office when several students came running into the office. The students advised that something was wrong with their substitute teacher. P12 and the principal responded and observed the substitute teacher staggering around the room. P12 escorted the substitute teacher to the school nurse’s office for evaluation. P12 recalled that the substitute was intoxicated and she could smell the odor of an alcohol beverage on him. P12 recalled that there was a big decision to make. Either arrest the substitute teacher or release him to a responsible party. P12 called the substitute teacher’s spouse at work and she told that she would come to the house and take care of him after she got off from work at 500 pm that day. When school was out at 400 pm the principal and the school nurse took the substitute teacher home.

P12 recalled that she experienced some stress from the initial time the students came into the office until a decision was made to take the substitute home without filing any criminal charges. At around 700 pm that evening the principal of the school called P12 at home and told her that the substitute teacher had committed suicide. P12 recalled that she began to question her decision of releasing the teacher instead of arresting him as she had originally planned. During the investigation that followed P12 learned from the substitute teacher’s spouse that the substitute was on medication for depression. P12
recalled that the incident was stressful but not to the extent, that it caused her extreme stress. However, the aftermath of the suicide and the investigation that followed brought out extreme stress.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P12 has served as a school peace officer for her entire career. P12 advised that she did not recall instruction in stress or stress management in the basic peace officer academy. She did state that there was training on remaining calm in the face of danger and areas of instruction related to alcoholism. P12 has also received training in the Active Shooter course. As part of that curriculum, stress management is addressed. However, P12 remarked that the training was of no benefit to her and therefore did not assist her in the handling of her critical incident at anytime.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical incident and the outcomes?

P12 is a school peace officer on a middle school campus. P12 recalled that she was in the office speaking with the principal when several students alerted her of a problem with a substitute teacher. P12 and the principal went to the classroom to investigate. P12 recalled that she smelled alcohol on the substitute teacher. P12 went on to add that the teacher was staggering around the room. P12 and the principal escorted the substitute teacher to the school nurse’s office to investigate further. P12 along with the principal had a decision to make, to arrest the teacher or release him. P12 decided to contact the substitute teacher’s spouse and ask if she would take charge of him. The spouse agreed to accept responsibility and agreed to meet them at their residence. The
principal and the school nurse drove the substitute home and released him to his spouse. Later on that evening P12 recalled that, she was contacted by the principal who advised her that the substitute teacher had taken his own life. P12 reported that she began to experience an extreme amount of stress due to her decision to release the teacher instead of arresting him. P12 stated that she did not recall any training in her basic peace officer academy specifically addressing stress. She has however attended several courses dealing with Active Shooter where critical incident stress is addressed. However, P12 stated that she did not recall any of the training assisting her in dealing with her stress during either the initial encounter at school or when she was notified that the substitute teacher had taken his own life later that evening. P12 advised that she did not see any relationship between the training the incident and the outcome. P12 confirmed that there should be more training throughout an officer’s career in order to assist them properly with the recognition and handling of stress.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 13 Case Synopsis

P13 has been a law enforcement officer for just over twenty-one (21) years with experience in patrol, K-9, criminal investigations, special weapons and tactics teams, as a supervisor, mid range management responsibilities and now as an administrator. P13 stated that in the academy there was some instruction in the recognition and handling of stress. The instructor encouraged the students to bring in their spouses and hear about stress from the spouse’s perspective. He did not recall any specifics other than getting his wife involved. In addition, P13 recalled that he has attended critical incident stress
management training. P13 is a critical incident stress team member trained to assist others with their stress due to a stressful critical incident. P13 has also received training addressing stress in Special Weapons and Tactics course involving team incidents as well as Active Shooter courses on numerous occasions. P13 recalled that training in recognition and handling of stress resulting from a critical incident is where the majority of his specialty training has originated.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P13 was a patrol supervisor on a patrol shift late at night when a call came in reference to a man wielding a sword walking in front of his home. Several patrol units were sent to the call including P13. When P13 arrived on scene and exited his patrol unit, he heard a single gunshot. P13 immediately notifies the dispatcher that there has been a shooting and to send medical assistance and additional units. P13 called the other officers on the radio as he proceeds to the area outside of the residence where the shot came from. P13 encountered Officer A, who told him that the man ran at him from inside the house with the sword in his hand. Officer A was standing outside of a bedroom window next to a fence about two feet away. When the man charged him at the window, he reacted and fired his weapon in self-defense. Officers forced entry into the residence and removed the sword from the actor’s hand. P13 instructed the other officers to check the remainder of the residence to see if anyone else was armed or held against his or her will. The man displaying the sword expired before the paramedics arrived.

P13 then escorted Officer A outside and took his duty weapon as evidence and in return gave Officer A his weapon. P13 believed that this is very important to an officer
not to have an empty holster because officers feel they are not in uniform so to speak and other officers would look at him in a different way. Officer A was placed on administrative leave with pay but still took it very hard. P13 and other officers went by on a regular basis to check on Officer A, taking him out to eat as well as to offer their friendship during this very trying time. After the investigation was over Officer A was never the same and he left the department a short time later. P13 recalled that approximately six months after Officer A left the department he received a letter from Officer A. Officer A stated that he had been under extreme stress during the whole ordeal but that P13 had been very good to him and he wanted to thank him. Officer A went to say that without the assistance from P13 and the other officer’s Officer A would have struggled even more than he did. P13 remarked that stress from others during a crisis is transferred to you because you are there. He experienced his own stress from the incident but he was able to cope with it due to his training and his religious faith.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident. Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P13 currently serves as a police lieutenant. P13 has worked in patrol, K-9 and as a special weapons and tactics team member. P13 stated in the basic peace officer academy one of the instructor’s wives came and discussed stress from her perspective. In addition, P13 has received training in critical incident stress management and stress management for special weapons and tactics situations as well. P13 remembered that during the situation he was on autopilot doing what was needed for him to do his job. P13 explained what he had meant by autopilot by adding that his training had mentally prepared him for how to react to a stressful situation. The training was very repetitive but very thorough. It
was not until after the situation had started to calm down that it all hit him as to what had happened. P13 recalled that his training carried him through along with his spiritual belief in God. P13 believes that more training in dealing with critical incident stress should start early on.

P13 affirmed from a supervisor’s perspective many officers have never faced a critical incident that causes this amount of stress before entering law enforcement. When the new officers face that first critical incident while in training, they can adapt and it causes them to resign. Many departments are loosing officers because they did not know what to expect and it shocks them to their very core. P13 stated that it comes down to two very important factors. One, they were not prepared which is immediately apparent because they did not know how to deal with the stressful critical incident. Two, it becomes a management situation. P13 provided in the grand scheme of things the agency has spent the money to send this person to a basic academy and get them equipped and out on the street and our investment is gone when they walk out the door. P13 stated that training in something that happens in this profession everyday is fundamental. P13 stated that his training had a positive effect when facing his particular stressful critical incident. P13 advised he has a strong foundation for addressing stressful incidents and it was of tremendous assistance for during this situation.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical incident and the outcomes?

P13 currently serves as a police administrator. P13 has worked as patrol officer, K-9 officer and as a special weapons and tactics team member and supervisor. P13 recalled that he and several patrol officers were sent to a residential neighborhood where
a man had been observed walking in front of his house waving a sword. When P13 arrived on scene, several units had already deployed around the house to locate the man with the sword. As P13 exited his patrol car, he a single gun shot. P13 immediately notified the communications operator of the incident and requested emergency medical assistance and additional units. As P13 responded to the area where the shot had come from, he encountered several officers including Officer A. Officer A provided P13 with the fact that Officer A had fired in self-defense. Officer A was standing outside of a bedroom window of the house. The actor with the sword charged at Officer A from inside the residence and Officer reacted by stopping the actor from killing him by firing his weapon.

P13 recalled that the incident was stressful but he relied on his prior training to recognize the stress was occurring and control it and the situation at hand. P13 recalled a direct connection between his prior training, the critical incident that evening and the outcome. P13 went to add that if Officer A had taken the same critical incident stress management courses that P13 had been involved with, Officer A would most likely still be a peace officer today. P13 noted that he went on autopilot after he arrived on scene and heard the single gunshot. P13 added that the autopilot was his mental preparation for a stressful incident prepared for with the training. P13 recalled that the training was very beneficial and now as a peace officer in a management position, he was working to equip every officer under his command with the same preparation by sending them to a critical incident stress management course.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.
Participant 14 Case Synopsis

P14 has been a peace officer with twenty-four (24) years of experience in patrol, criminal investigations and supervisory positions. P14 recalled when he attended the basic peace officer academy years ago there was no training that specifically addressed stress. P14 recalled there was training in dealing with critical incidents. The critical incident training provided mental preparation to assist the officer by concentrating on the actual incident rather than on the outcome. In addition, P14 has attended an Active Shooter in-service course and critical incident stress is covered in that training curriculum.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P14 was a patrol officer working the 10 pm to 6 am shift. P14 recalled the previous shift and his supervisor told him that a man had made threats against a family because the estranged wife refused to let him see his daughter. P14 recalled that at 1021 pm he and two other officers received a call of shots fired at the same address they were briefed on earlier that evening. P14 was the last to arrive at the home. As P14 approached the door he noticed blood on the sidewalk. P14 called for the other officers but received no response. As P14 entered, the house there was one dim light on in the hallway. P14 recalled using his flashlight sparingly to avoid detection. As P14 was walking, he almost tripped over something on the floor. He shined his light and it was the body of an older man deceased from a gunshot wound. P14 checked for pulse but there was none.

As P14 continued into the central area of the home, he could hear a moaning noise. He located a woman sitting on a sofa. He spoke to her quietly asking was the
shooter still in the house but the woman could not answer. P14 called on his radio for the location of the other officers but they did not answer either. P14 recalled that he was in fear that the shooter was still present and he was in danger but he could not leave the woman on the sofa. P14 continued to call out in a loud voice that he was a police officer and for the shooter to surrender. After several minutes P14 heard a door slowly open in a hallway where the light was coming from. P14 ordered the person to show their hands but the light was so dim P14 could not see anything other than a shadow. As P14 aimed his weapon in the direction of the shadow, he began pulling the trigger slowly and just before he was, about to shoot a child came running into his arms crying. P14 covered her face to shield her from the other person’s injuries and backed out of the house. Paramedics and other officers were outside waiting. As P14 relayed to other officers what he had seen a single shot was heard coming from inside the residence. P14 and the other officers returned to the home. It was determined that the shooter had taken his own life and the other two officers were okay in another room of the house. They did not want to answer P14 for fear of giving their location away to the shooter. A neighbor came up and told them that another victim was bleeding on her doorstep. He died before arriving at the hospital. In all five people died that night including the shooter. P14 relayed that there was stress from the time he went to the call until it was over. P14 recalled that nothing in his training had prepared him for this type of call; it was just a survival instinct.

Third Step: How did each participant handle the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all, as they relate to training.

P14 current serves as a school peace officer. P14 has worked patrol and has served as a supervisor. P14 recalled that in his basic peace officer academy there was not
a section specifically addressing stress. However, there was training in dealing with critical incidents and that they may be stressful. P14 relayed that the instructors discussed being nervous, staying focused and to concentrate on the actual objective not just the outcome. P14 said that he did not believe that any training could help to prepare, as he needed to be during his particular stressful critical incident that early morning. P14 believed it was his basic survival instincts and not any type of training. P14 went on to say that, there should be more thorough training in the basic peace officer academy as well as during in-service courses addressing the recognition and handling of stressful critical incidents. P14 stated the training he had been through had no effect on him.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical incident and the outcomes?

P14 along with two other patrol officers were sent to a residence in reference to a possible shooting. P14 recalled that before the shift began that evening his supervisor had informed the officers of a threat made against the people at this address in relation to a custody battle over a small child. P14 arrived after the other officers and observed the door to the residence open with fresh blood on the step and threshold area. As P14 entered the residence, he almost fell in the dark over an older man lying dead on the floor. P14 could hear noises and followed them to a living room where a woman lay on the couch suffering from a gunshot wound to the chest. As he tried to talk to her, he continued to call out for the other officers to respond. P14 was observing a dimly lit hallway directly in front of the couch for indication of the shooter or other officers. As he continued to watch for any signs, he heard a door in the hallway open. P14 remembered that he began squeezing the trigger as the figured continued down the hallway despite his
attempts to get the subject to stop and get on the floor. Just as P14 was prepared to fire his weapon, a child rushed into his arms crying. P14 immediately withdrew from the residence. A short time later, the actor still inside the residence took his own life. P14 in recalling the incident did not think any amount of training could have prepared an individual to handle the stress related for what he encountered that evening. P14 again reiterated that he believed he still alive due to his basic survival instinct and not from any type of training, he received.

First Step: Identify any training obtained in the recognition of stress, critical incidents or a closely related topic.

Participant 15 Case Synopsis

P15 has been a peace officer for five (5) years with all of that time serving as a patrol officer in several agencies. P15 recalled that there was training in the basic peace officer academy specifically addressing stress. The training discussed avoiding tunnel vision, recognition of stressful encounters and maintaining open lines of communication to facilitate any healing needed.

Second Step: Identify and describe a specific critical incident experienced by the participant.

P15 is a peace officer working a daytime patrol shift when the communications operator advises that a man has fired several shots at a Texas Department of Public Safety Trooper during a traffic stop. The gunman then fled the scene in his automobile after firing on the State Trooper. P15 then drives to the area to assist in locating the gunman. The communications operator advised P15 that the gunman has abandoned his automobile and has stolen a vehicle and is fleeing with other law enforcement officers
giving chase. P15 proceeds to the area to assist with locating and stopping the actor. P15 locates the actor and gives chase. During the short pursuit, the actor fires his rifle several times at P15 striking his patrol car. P15 does not return fire for fear of hitting a passing motorist. The gunman flees into a residential neighborhood trying to elude P15 and the other officers giving chase. P15 recalled that the gunman manages to exit the stolen car in a residential neighborhood and forces his way into a residence, holding a family hostage. P15 recalled that the entire neighborhood was evacuated for safety precautions. P15 said that hostage negotiators are requested the scene in an attempt to talk the gunman out of the house without any further injuries or death. P15 said that the gunman was very agitated and continually fires his weapon at the officers. No injuries occurred. Officers do not return fire for fear of injuring one of the hostages inside. The standoff last for over seventeen hours before the gunman lays down his weapon and gives up to the officers outside. P15 recalled that from the time the communications operator advised him of the critical incident involving the shooting he was experiencing stress until the man surrendered to the authorities. P15 recalled that he was able to keep it under control so he could function. Third Step: How each participant handled the critical incident? Were the outcomes positive, negative or had no effect at all as they relate to training.

P15 currently serves as a patrol officer and has worked as a peace officer for over five years. P15 recalled that he was not sure if in the basic peace officer academy there was specific training concerning stress. P15 went on to say that, many areas of his training have influenced him and made him aware of stress during a critical incident. P15 said that he could not say that any one area of the training was more beneficial than any another. P15 believed that it all assisted him during his specific stressful critical incident.
P15 did say that the training in both the academy and in-service courses has provided him with one important thing, confidence. P15 recalled that confidence affects his stress and keeps it under control. P15 recalled that the training had a positive effect on him during his short career.

Fourth Step: Is there a relationship between the three items, training, critical incident and the outcomes?

P15 recalled that he was on patrol when the communications operator advised that a man had fired his rifle at a Texas Department of Public Safety Trooper during a traffic stop. The man then fled the area. P15 and several other officers located the gunman and gave chase. The gunman fired numerous times striking P15’s unit. The gunman exited his vehicle and forced his way into a home taking a family hostage. The ordeal lasted for over seventeen hours before the gunman surrendered. P15 advised that he was experiencing stress during the entire incident. P15 recalled that he used numerous areas of his basic peace officer training and in-service classes to assist him that day. P15 recalled to him there was a strong connection between his training the critical incident and the way he handled the stress. P15 stated that all the areas of training provided him with confidence to address the critical incident and move forward.

Phenomenological Analysis of Data

After interviewing each participant and transcribing their lived experiences onto index cards for easier review, inherent themes emerged from the data. These themes are the discussion that will follow. The researcher accompanied by Dr. Roger Manning, examined the data and allowed the essence of the meaning to emerge. In performing this
step, the researcher gathered clusters of meaning from common themes among the fifteen participants. Moustakas (1994) stated that the themes communicate the essence of the clusters. These themes identify how training assists in recognizing and addressing stress arising during a critical incident while serving as a peace officer.

The interviews were conducted with fifteen officers from two law enforcement agencies in West Texas. The study involved seven female and eight male officers. Seven officer participants identified a highly stressful critical incident during their interviews. These critical incident areas include situations such as officer involved shootings, incidents where the shooting is still in progress, individuals with a gun or individuals with other types of deadly weapons. Eight officer participants identified low stressful critical incident during their interviews. These critical incidents areas include situations such as making an arrest of a combative subject, investigation of suspicious persons, and disturbances. Of the seven officers that identified with high stress, two were females P2 and P9. Both of these officers stated that the training they had received was beneficial to them during their stressful critical incident. The remainder of the officers that identified with high stress were male officers, P6, P7, P13, P14 and P15. Of these five officers, P6, P7, P13 and P15 stated that the training they had received was effective during their individual critical incident. P14 stated that the training did not provide any assistance for him during his stressful critical incident.

Of the fifteen officer participants in the study, six officers, four female officers, P1, P5, P11, and P12, along with two male officers, P4 and P14 advised that the prior training was not beneficial to them in assisting with recognizing and handling of stress during their particular critical incident. While nine officers, three female, P2, P3 and P9
along with six male, P6, P7, P8, P10, P13 and P15 stated the prior training was beneficial in the recognition and handling of stress during their critical incident in the field.

The fifteen officer participants all provided areas of training that benefited them in addressing their critical incident stress. Five officers, two female officers P1 and P2, and three male officers P6, P8 and P13 advised they had received training in the recognition and handling of stress in relation to a critical incident. Three officers, one female P5 and two male officers P4 and P7 advised that they relieved their stress with officer involvement. Officer involvement is identified as talking and interacting with other officers to lower their stress levels. Six officers, three female officers P9, P11 and P12, along with three male officers, P10, P13 and P14 all advised that they had received training in the Active Shooter training course that addressed ways to handle critical incident stress. Two male officers, P14 and P15 advised that they had received prior training the recognition and handling of critical incidents that greatly assisted them. One female officer, P3 advised that her overall training was beneficial not just one particular area of training. P13 was the only male officer that identified two sources of training in the recognition of stress in a critical incident. P15 added that he benefited from training specifically addressing critical incidents but also from areas such as police professionalism, ethics, and patrol procedures.

Tenure of service as a peace officer did not have any effect on the eventual outcomes of the study. For the nine officers that stated that their training was beneficial their years of service as a law enforcement officer ranged from one year to thirty-one years. For the six officers that stated that their prior training was of no benefit these officers tenure as peace officers ranged from five years to thirty years. Of the fifteen
officer participants in the study, five officers, P2, P3, P6, P13 and P14 related they had an automatic reaction to the critical incident. By automatic, these officers stated that they just reacted to their stressful critical incident. Of those five officers, four officers, P2, P3, were female officers and P6 and P13 were male officers who stated that the automatic reaction was due to their prior training. The fifth officer, P14, a male officer, stated that the prior training had no effect on his ability to react to his critical incident. P14 stated that the reaction was a human instinct to survive and had nothing to do with any prior training he had received.

In the participant chart that follows the fifteen-law enforcement officer participant’s responses were broken down for immediate review. First, is the assigned number for each participant starting with P1 and ending with P15. Next is the gender designation. Then a heading designating the type of training the officers stated benefited them in their critical incident. These designations are S-Stress; T- Training; OI- Officer Involvement; AS- Active Shooter; CI- Critical Incident. The next designation identifies if the training was effective or ineffective. The next row identifies if the officer had an automatic response to their stressful critical incident or not. The last row designates if the critical incident encountered was of low or high level stress.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

This chapter will discuss the findings. Identify conclusions in the study as well as recommendations for future research. This phenomenological study examined data from in-depth interviews with fifteen-law enforcement officer participants from two West Texas agencies. The study seeks to determine if their prior training better prepared the officers for the recognition and handling of stress during a critical incident in the field. The results show that the prior training has a direct impact on the recognition and handling of a stressful critical incident in a field situation. The study relied on a qualitative design by examining a phenomenon that occurred in a field situation to an individual law enforcement officer.

The law enforcement profession is stressful in the same sense that any occupation is stressful (Malloy, 1984). The law enforcement field is in itself a very dangerous occupation where officers face physical violence and the possibility of death on a recurrent basis. Law enforcement officers must prepare themselves for potential violent encounters. Proper training, both mentally and physically to combat stressful critical incidents is necessary in order to survive the mayhem. Zettlemoyer (2006) stated if the officer lacks proper training to face the encounter, negative results could be catastrophic. Law enforcement agencies should seek to protect the psychological well-being of officers by providing policies, procedures and proper training. This avenue of support not only
supports the officers, but likewise his agency and ultimately the community he seeks to protect.

The phenomenological study by design focuses on the lived experience of the individual officer to collect data from their personal critical incidents. Phenomenological investigation centers on a general theme, what is the composition and real meaning or experience of this phenomenon for this person? (Patton, 1990). The study constructs a full description of a critical incident provided by the participant of their conscious experience and examines this data while the phenomenon remains in tact (Moustakas, 1994). In utilizing the phenomenological method for collecting data in this study, the researcher utilized the lived critical incidents of the participant officers to explore a phenomenon. Was law enforcement training in the recognition and controlling of stressful critical incident beneficial? Even though the researcher is a law enforcement officer and has faced numerous critical incidents in over twenty five years of service, the interviews provided data for a more thorough understanding of training regimes in place to handle critical incident stress.

This phenomenological study sought to recognize that proper training in the recognition and handling of stress is beneficial for the law enforcement officer in the field during a critical incident. The phenomenological study sought to extract the lived experiences of the law enforcement officer participants as they encountered a stressful critical incident in the field. The main research question in this study is; was prior training in the recognition and handling of a stressful critical incident beneficial in a field situation? The aim of the study was to interview law enforcement officers concerning their lived stressful critical incident to determine if prior training was beneficial. The next
The criterion for participation in this study was the individual had to be an active full time peace officer that had received training in stress or a similar area. Second, the officer must have experienced a critical incident in the field that resulted in stress. Fifteen law enforcement officers from two law enforcement agencies in West Texas were involved in the study. Included in the study were seven female officers and eight male officers. The female officers ranged from thirty to forty-eight years of age, with an experience levels from three to twenty-one years of service. The male officers ranged from twenty-seven to fifty-one years of age with an experience levels from one to thirty-one years of service. The fifteen participants were the first to return the letters of Informed Consent, Appendix B to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted in a similar arrangement to ensure fairness to each participant. The interviews were held at each officer’s respective agency in a room provided by the agency administrator. The rooms were not equipped with a phone. Each participant was provided with a copy of the Guided Questions, Appendix A. Each interview was taped to ensure proper transcription of the participants lived experience. The interviews were not structured and the participant was in control of the interview process to allow for a full disclosure of the lived critical incident. If the participant information lacked substance, the researcher would ask follow-up questions for further information or explanation.
After all fifteen interviews with the participant law enforcement officers had taken place the researcher transcribed the interviews word for word onto index cards for an overall view of the data allowing for inherent themes present in the data to appear. These transcriptions provided the data necessary for this study. To analyze the data the researcher repeatedly read over the transcripts in order to absorb the wholeness of the lived critical incident. The researcher accompanied by Dr. Roger Manning, examined the data and allowed the essence of the meaning to emerge. As stated previously by performing this step the researcher gathered clusters of meaning from common themes among the fifteen law enforcement officer participants. The process provided the researcher with a more comprehensive descriptive understanding of the lived experience of each of the fifteen law enforcement officer participants. These inherent themes in the data identify how training contributes to recognition and managing stress arising during a critical incident while performing the duties of a peace officer.

Conclusions

In this study the researcher sought to answer the question, does prior training in the recognition and handling of stress benefit an officer in the field when faced with stressful critical incident? The results of this study have shown that prior training in the recognition and handling of stress are beneficial to law enforcement officers in a stressful critical incident in the field. Nine of the fifteen law enforcement officer participants stated that in fact their training served them well and assisted them with their stressful critical incident. Six officers stated that the training had no effect on their ability to
recognize and handle a stressful critical incident. All fifteen of the participants had received training in the recognition of stress or a closely related topic. Five officers received training directly dealing with stress, six officers had prior training in the Active Shooter Course where stress is part of that training, two officers had prior training specifically addressing critical incidents and three officer identified officer involvement in addressing stressful critical incidents.

Kureczka (1996) states that combating critical incident stress begins with a vital element, pre-incident stress education. Educating the officers on the effects of critical incident stress beforehand, aids in reducing the overall impact of the critical event. With proper training in critical incident stress, the officer is better equipped to recognize and handle the stress they encounter in the field. Kureczka (1996) went on to add that another valuable aspect of the pre-incident training is the fact that the officer will be better suited to recognize the effects of critical incident stress and seek assistance if necessary. This will assist in their return to full duty healthier and safer.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discern how the fifteen law enforcement officer participants experience the phenomenon. Then, to allow the phenomenological experience of each participant to speak to the researcher through the data collected in the study. The researcher then identified if training was beneficial in assisting officers with stressful critical incident in the field. The main purpose or goal is to identify that the purpose of phenomenological studies is to discover how each participant distinguishes the incident and then allow them to put it into their own words (Moustakas, 1994). Law enforcement agencies should shift their training from lecture content to self-directed learning. In doing so agency should recognize officers are more
involved in putting their training to practice. This training will allow agencies to retain officers that are well prepared to respond to emergencies (Della, 2004).

Law enforcement officers need to be properly prepared before entering a crisis. When an officer faces a critical incident, it is too late to consider the training that should have been provided in order for that officer and others to survive (Brown, 1993). Properly trained officers both mentally and physically by their respective agencies significantly enhance their chance of surviving a critical incident (Brown, 1993). Training is an important part of a law enforcement agencies responsibility to the officer and the community he serves. Lack of training provides avenues for civil action and ultimately could cost officers their lives if not prepared to survive.

This measurement utilized within this study identified in Chapter Three Methodology, is the Critical Incident Technique by Colonel John C. Flanagan (1954). The critical incident technique is a method for gathering direct observations of behavior to examine their efficacy in resolving practical problems. The critical incident technique is not a rigid method for the collection of observable data, but an adaptable technique formulated to meet the specific needs of the study. Flanagan (1954) added that data is truthful if it is complete, and if the participants relating to their incident provide specific details. Likewise, unclear descriptions may yield that some data could be incorrect or require further questioning and explanation. The critical incident technique by Flanagan (1954) sought to assist in the recognition of a problem by gathering of direct observations from participants. After collection of the data, an analysis takes places to encapsulate and illustrate the data in a proficient manner for use in numerous functional purposes (Flanagan, 1954).
Recommendations

This study is limited to the assessment of the fifteen participant law enforcement officers from two West Texas law enforcement agencies. One recommendation would include studies of this nature involving several geographical regions of the state in several police agencies. The state standards for training new officers are regulated by a state mandated training curriculum. However, each agency may provide additional training in areas of stress, critical incidents and Active Shooter, as they deem necessary. Budgetary concerns, availability of training officers and agency staffing could have an impact on the availability of training in the recognition and handling of critical incident stress. Future studies could focus solely on academy training or in-service training as separate studies. A future study could examine stressful critical incidents solely involving supervisory officers or line officers that have not been promoted to a supervisory position. Other studies could replicate this study from samples of law enforcement officers in this and other states. Another closely related profession, such as probation or parole officers could be utilized to replicate this study.

The sample of participants involved in this study was fifteen, which future studies could encompass a larger sample to identify if size plays a factor. Another future study could narrow the focus of the tenure of the officers to include officers with more experience or officers just exiting field training now working on their own. An area that the researcher did not study is males and justice orientated females from several areas of the state. Another recommendation involves how female officers respond to stress as compared to male officers. This study did not identify differences in male and female
officers’ perceptions of stress or their view of stressful critical incidents. Whatever the reason for future study this researcher idealizes that the research will continue to better train officers both mentally and physically to protect themselves and the community they serve. In doing so this research and future studies will most of all improve survival skills for officers when they encounter dangerous situations in the field.

General Conclusions

The researcher sought to explore if prior training in the recognition and handling of stress during a critical incident was beneficial to law enforcement officers in the field. The researcher interviewed fifteen peace officers from two West Texas law enforcement agencies for the study. Of the fifteen peace officers, nine stated that the training they had received was in fact very beneficial to them to be able to react under stress to a critical incident they incurred in the field. The researcher concurs with the study due to the fact that the researcher is a peace officer and has relied on prior training to assist in stressful critical incidents. Training is an important part of police work and is considered by many to be a career long learning experience. The researcher is also an academy training coordinator and has seen first hand how training is beneficial to officers in the field.

The study does not infer that training should be considered as 100% effective in all situations. It does state that for nine of the fifteen officers in this study it was very beneficial. The researcher sought to evaluate the levels of training within the training regimens. This study provides valuable information for future training. Training should be evaluated for effectiveness on a regular basis. As values change in society so go the police profession. As such, the next generation may learn in a different manner than did
the previous generation. Training should be provided more often and in a manner that reflects the needs of the particular adult learners. Lecture will play a role in training but to be effective and to have proper memory and muscle retention it has been shown that hands on types of training are most effective.

The study was limited in scope to fifteen officers from two West Texas law enforcement agencies. This researcher envisions a future study that is conducted by individual law enforcement agencies with the results being forward to the state licensing authority that establishes training guideline. These results on a broader scale may reveal more understanding of what is needed in the areas of stressful critical incidents as well as all areas of peace officer training. The study was very revealing and affirmed training guidelines conducted in the basic peace officer academy but also conducted for officer in-service training.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX GUIDED QUESTIONS

Opening remarks

The opening remarks will be free-flowing and not scripted.

Question

1. How long have you been a law enforcement officer?

2. Have you ever been involved in a critical incident/situation where there was stress?

3. Tell me about that situation.

4. When the situation was occurring and you were feeling stress did you use your prior training to control your stress?

5. What were your thoughts at this time?

6. What were you feeling during this situation?

7. Do you have anything to add