

COPING MECHANISMS OF 9-1-1 POLICE DISPATCHERS

BY

CASANDRA KATRINA CASILLAS PERRY

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**SIGNATURE PAGE**

This dissertation has been examined and approved.



8/16/23

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Cassandra Smith, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Date



8.16.23

---

Stacey Malaret, Ed.D., Committee Member

Date



8/18/23

---

Christina Gehrke, DBA, Committee Member

Date



8/21/23

---

Vicki Butler, Ed.D., Dean

Date

## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, Scott, who always supported me, distracted our little one, and helped push me to write to finish this journey.

To my daughter, Kenzie, remember all things are possible. Never be afraid to pursue your dreams and goals.

In loving memory of my mom, Erin, who always encouraged me to persevere through school and gave me love of learning and reading. I wish you could be here to see me finish. I know you would be proud.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Frequently, 9-1-1 police dispatchers are accountable for the gathering and distribution of emergency information to police, fire, and medical units before they arrive. Turnover, understaffing, and low staff retention are national concerns in 9-1-1 emergency dispatch centers. This qualitative phenomenology study discovered how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers prevent and/or recover from burnout. The researcher applied cognitive appraisal theory to see how some individuals adjusted, adapted, and coped with presenting environmental stressors and/or conditions. Individual interviews served as the data source. Participants were selected through purposive sampling from two similar police departments in Arizona and California. The qualitative phenomenology research design assisted in exploring the influence coping mechanisms can have to sustain this type of career. Content analysis was used to code and discover emergent themes from individual interviews. As 9-1-1 dispatch centers nationwide face high turnover and low retention, this study contributes insights into coping mechanisms. Finding out how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers use coping mechanisms provides resources to new 9-1-1 police dispatchers to reduce turnover/or recover from burnout. Key findings included that 9-1-1 police dispatchers experience stressors similar to other emergency service personnel with additional stressors present, including processing calls for service, environment, staffing, not knowing the closure of calls, lack of management, and dealing with traumatic events. This study influences social change in providing perceptions of stressors faced by dispatchers and the ways they cope with these stressors to reduce burnout and turnover.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Typically, 9-1-1 police dispatchers answer emergency and nonemergency phone calls and categorize law enforcement officers' response to crime, medical, and accident scenes (Lum et al., 2020b). Dispatcher job demands are high, alluding to psychological, physical, social, and organizational burdens (Schaufeli, 2017). Those pressures cause stress and eventually high turnover in 9-1-1 police dispatch centers (Lum, 2020b). With 9-1-1 center managers' and directors' incapacity to manage the turnover rate efficiently, 9-1-1 centers become understaffed (Lum et al., 2020b). Lum et al. (2020b) advised that the emergency telephone number meant to render assistance immediately has lengthier wait times for callers, overdue dispatching of officers to respond to calls, and prolonged response times, thereby placing the public and respondents at risk.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (2017) projected that the public makes more than 240 million calls to 911 for emergency services yearly. The number of annual calls signifies the ongoing need for qualified and knowledgeable 9-1-1 dispatch employees to work at the country's various public safety answering points (PSAP; Stafford, 2016). Dispatchers in the United States endure a higher-than-average national turnover rate of 19% as of 2012 despite the steady increase in call volume nationwide (Baseman et al., 2018; Frederiksen, 2017; Lee et al., 2017). Responsive Efforts to Address Integral Needs in Staffing (RETAINS) advised that when employees were asked if they expected to stay in their current job for five or more years, 19% said they would not (Doody et al., 2018). Nine years later, the employee turnover rate industry-wide had increased substantially to 29.5% (Doody et al., 2018). Research conducted in 2018 by the Association of Public Safety Communication Officials (APCO) International RETAINS

called the staffing shortage a crisis for the industry, affecting not only the personnel working in public safety communications centers but also causing a public safety concern.

The average career length for a 9-1-1 police dispatcher is one to three years (Baseman et al., 2018; Frederiksen, 2017; Lee et al., 2017). Defining the length of a career for public safety communicators is difficult. According to Meischke et al. (2015), a range of 5–20 years of service would encompass 60% of communicators. Those who stay in the industry longer than three years are considered long term (Frederiksen, 2017; Lee et al., 2017). High turnover rates decrease overall morale among existing workers and may trigger extra turnover intention between those left behind creating more over time that could lead to burnout (Lee et al., 2018; Lopez-Martin & Topa, 2019). Therefore, examining coping mechanisms from long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers would potentially close the gap to lessening burnout and turnover in 9-1-1 dispatch centers (Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015; Synard & Gazzola, 2017; Vorell & Carmack, 2014).

Chapter 1 connects the significance of the study to leadership. Research questions precede a conversation about the theoretical framework supporting the study. Chapter 1 concludes with (a) definitions of terms, (b) limitations, and delimitations, and (c) a summary of key points of the proposed study.

### **Study Background/Foundation**

Generally, 9-1-1 police dispatchers are highly accomplished and qualified employees who work in 9-1-1 police dispatch centers, where they receive requests for assistance over the phone and then, using a computer-aided dispatch and radio system, activate and organize respondents (Doody et al., 2018). The high job stresses mean high

turnover and burnout for 9-1-1 police dispatchers (Lum et al., 2020a). Turnover leaves 9-1-1 police dispatch centers shorthanded, which decreases their working efficiency and puts the public and responders at risk. Lu et al. (2017) agreed that though recognized, work-related stress resulting from occupational pressures has a clear association with burnout and turnover, and the author agreed that no research exists about the meaning of how to overcome these stressors and burnout.

The burden to perform and meet deadlines, little independence, call center environmental circumstances, lack of leadership support, secrecy, and separation between dispatchers and police officers form the foundation of stress in the 9-1-1 police dispatch center (Gurevich et al., 2018). Like commercial call centers, work-related stress increases turnover and reduces operational effectiveness (Jain et al., 2013). However, stress is a consequence of the job, making it vital to determine possible persuading influences to avert burnout and high turnover (Lu et al., 2017; Huynh et al., 2014). Working as a 9-1-1 police dispatcher involves both well-being and safety risk (Baseman et al., 2018). Carleton et al. (2018) and Stacey et al. (2017) advised that finding long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers' coping strategies can potentially lessen turnover and create a better working environment.

### **Current State of the Field in which the Problem Exists**

PSAPs operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (Sattler et al., 2014; Stafford, 2016). The APCO conducted a study in 2005 called project RETAINS to address the lowest staffing needs within 9-1-1 call centers (Doody et al., 2018). Emergency 9-1-1 call centers need balance between the quality and the amount of service they deliver (Stafford, 2016). Doody et al. (2018) study included documentation about

factors contributing to the high turnover rates countrywide. While APCO's study served as a roadmap for present industry standards, more research and continuous research is needed (Doody et al., 2018). PSAPs must handle calls as rapidly and efficiently as possible while fulfilling specific time standards and preserving a continuous level of optimistic customer service (Sattler et al., 2014; Stafford, 2016). Folwell and Kauer (2018) explained that dispatchers make life-or-death choices daily, and it is essential that the correct resources such as police officers, firefighters, and paramedics respond to the correct locations each time.

Stafford (2016) documented 9-1-1 dispatch call centers, or PSAPs, nationwide by observing 30 dispatchers answering the phones, conducting 11 interviews with dispatch supervisors and managers, and interviewing 70 people who had contact with the police. APCO International is the oldest and largest public safety communication society in the world (Hall, 2016). The 9-1-1 dispatch centers encompass a variety of sizes and disciplines; some may dispatch only law enforcement, others only firefighters, while others may consist of a combination of the two (Stafford, 2016). Regions have moved toward combining various cities and/or having both fire and police dispatching. Stafford (2016) and Vorell and Carmack (2014) advised dispatching emergency services from one center, providing a faster reply to the public, and working within strict budget restraints.

Though only a few researchers have included findings about the influence trauma may have on 9-1-1 police dispatchers, Adams et al. (2018) advised that the current research recommends that 9-1-1 police dispatchers experience stress levels equivalent to, or exceeding, persons of other on-scene first responders. Each call can present added stressors, including vague data, highly multifaceted and complex medical needs,

communication problems because of language barriers or technology, and sending help to remote locations (Adams et al., 2018; Lilly & Pierce, 2013). As a result, 9-1-1 police dispatchers describe feelings of emotional distress, depressive, and trauma-based symptoms (Golding et al., 2017; Lilly & Pierce, 2013; Riou et al., 2018; Venet et al., 2018). Baseman et al. (2018), Klimley et al. (2018), Lilly and Pierce (2013), and Miller et al. (2017) agreed that 9-1-1 police dispatchers may have more exposure to stress-related burnout than police officers and access to fewer resources essential to uphold wellness.

Emotional distress, depression, and other trauma-based indications often are the consequence of vicarious trauma experiences and contribute to a higher-than-national average turnover rate of 29.5% (Baseman et al., 2018; Doody et al., 2018). A high turnover rate results in fewer knowledgeable dispatchers; the condition worsens with the cumulative request for PSAPs in the United States (Baseman et al., 2018; Klimley et al., 2018; Lilly & Pierce, 2013; Miller et al., 2017). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), personal and organizational stress, fatigue, burnout, lack of support from supervisors, compassion fatigue, and shift work are linked to turnover in this industry (Lilly & Allen, 2015; Klimley et al., 2018; Lilly & Pierce, 2013; Meischke et al., 2015, Ramey et al., 2016). While some local administration entities take steps to identify 9-1-1 police dispatchers' efforts, currently the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) classifies dispatchers as office and administrative support. Considering the duties of handling an emergency call, the job requires more than the standard office responsibilities. In 2019, Texas was the first state to recognize public safety dispatchers, or telecommunicators, as first responders (Next Generation Advanced, 2023). National Emergency Number Association (2023) explained that a total of 19 states have reclassified public safety

dispatchers, or telecommunicators, as first responders. Personnel, but this varies from state to state. Further, for dispatchers working in the industry, the potential for reclassification is the first step in ensuring qualified people are on the front lines of an emergency (National Emergency Number Association, 2023).

### **Historical Background**

The national emergency number was created over 50 years ago (National Emergency Number Association, 2018). In 1968, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established a three-digit emergency code with American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T). Progressive features began to appear in the early 70s, and as of 2018, around 96% of the United States had coverage by the 911 service number (National Emergency Number Association, 2018). In 2017, 38 US states received 212,036,639 calls to 911, an increasing over the previous year's report of 181,720,179 calls (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2017). The 9-1-1 police dispatchers are often the contact accountable for preserving the cognitive and emotional resources to perform multifaceted, multiple tasks, and make detailed choices with sometimes fateful consequences under life and death time constraints while remaining calm (Baseman et al., 2018). The 9-1-1 police dispatchers remain categorized as administrative professionals and considered a less critical component in public safety (Klimley et al., 2018; Maguire et al., 2018). Some do not view 9-1-1 police dispatchers as first responders (Wahlgren, 2020). However, 9-1-1 dispatchers make the initial communication with citizens who require assistance (Lum et al., 2020a). Greco and Fischetti (2018) advised that examining 9-1-1 police dispatchers might assist in gaining more recognition to get the resources required to aid new employees in coping with burnout and stress that comes with the job.

## **Deficiencies in the Evidence**

The literature does not fully address coping strategies to lessen 9-1-1 police dispatchers' burnout (Greco & Fischetti, 2018). Most studies focus on personnel considered first responders, such as police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians (Miller et al., 2017; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). Few studies are dedicated to 9-1-1 police dispatchers. Moreover, current research addresses the mental health of 9-1-1 police dispatchers because of the constant level of exposure to emergencies (Allen et al., 2016; Lilly & Allen, 2015; Lilly & Pierce, 2013; Steinkopf et al., 2018). Most of the literature highlights the health and well-being of firefighters, law enforcement personnel, emergency medical technicians, and other responders who are on the scene in the early minutes of a crisis (Dunn et al., 2017; Marmar et al., 2020; Hartley et al., 2013). More studies that address the association between job stress, job dissatisfaction, and employee preservation among 9-1-1 police dispatchers aid in generating a solid literature background on this topic (Miller et al., 2017). Krouse (2018) emphasized how the personnel deficiency in 9-1-1 call centers affects those reliant on the dispatcher's work. Davidson (2018) clarified how 9-1-1 dispatchers are working many hours of overtime to cover the shift shortages to evade delaying services to the people who call 9-1-1 for help. In addition, Davidson (2018) notes this issue has existed for many years, but no official data or research tracks the number of dispatchers and deficiencies in 9-1-1 call centers on a local or national level.

Based on the recommendations of Zito et al. (2018) and Han et al. (2016) researchers should examine turnover, burnout, supervisor support, and coping mechanisms. Zito et al.'s (2018) highlighted the gap investigated in this study in which

worker turnover was examined according to job satisfaction, emotional dissonance, burnout, and supervisors' support. Zito et al. (2018) recommended that the study be extended to public call centers because their study could not generalize the outcome across numerous industries. Han et al. (2016) investigated worker burnout and work exhaustion and recommended alternative origins. Han et al. (2016) examined employee turnover and burnout using the stress theory advanced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Han et al. (2016) suggested that future research use either newer or less documented theories as the basis for investigation.

Each year, roughly 2.4 million 9-1-1 calls are placed in the United States (FCC, 2019). American citizens depend on public safety communications centers to answer and process emergency calls to defend their lives and property (Kerr et al., 2019). Kerr et al. (2019) explained that with around 98,500 public safety dispatchers responding and processing 9-1-1 calls each day, it is vital that industry leaders gather evidence that could lead to a better understanding of why capable and knowledgeable dispatchers are leaving the industry.

### **Problem Statement**

Previous studies are focused on the insights of stress from other emergency service specialists (e.g., police officers, firefighters), therefore little research exists about the reasons for 9-1-1 police dispatchers' burnout. 9-1-1 police dispatchers are exposed to psychological, physiological, and emotional stressors comparable to field first responders (Beck et al., 2015; Coldridge & Davies, 2017; de Visser et al., 2016; Pezaro et al., 2016; Pierce & Lilly, 2013; Regehr et al., 2013; Rivera, 2015). The specific problem relates to compassion fatigue, burnout, stress, and ultimately high turnover of emergency service

personnel, particularly 9-1-1 police dispatchers. Persons undergoing burnout may repeatedly feel defeated leading to a negative view about life and feelings of desperation (Salyers et al., 2017). Few researchers have examined coping strategies, defensive factors, and how resilience develops in 9-1-1 police dispatchers. APCO (2010) noted that 97% of public safety emergency communications employees will not work in the occupation long enough to retire. The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (2017) explained that national turnover rate increased from 17% in 2005 to 19% in 2009, while more information about the high turnover and the difficulties with retaining employees in this population is required.

### **Audience**

Current 9-1-1 police dispatchers, supervisors, managers, command staff, and citizens could benefit from a study that examines possible coping strategies from long-term dispatchers. The influence and advice from long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers could potentially lessen the burnout for newer employees, help to create a better work environment, and aid in helping new employees develop the motivation to remain in their position. This advice could also benefit a variety of shift work careers. When 9-1-1 police dispatch centers' supervisors or managers learn how to implement changes that improve staffing, current employees may benefit as overtime shifts decrease, vacation request increase, and employees' morale grows (Marshall & Laorenza, 2018). These changes may benefit all future personnel from the transformation as well because they will be employed at a 9-1-1 police dispatch center that no longer deals with extreme staff shortages (Marshall & Laorenza, 2018). Improved staffing also benefits the public with better service and safety. Synard and Gazzola, (2017) explained that studying the coping

strategies of long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers could result in current and future 9-1-1 police dispatchers, call centers' management, and the public served addressing this problem and applying solutions.

### **Specific Leadership Problem**

Organizational commitment affects turnover in the organization where employees work (Ahn et al., 2015). Organizational commitment refers to how employees connect with the employer (Kan & Majeed, 2020). Kan and Majeed (2020) explored organizational commitment and discovered that organizational commitment and coping strategies are highly positively associated with job satisfaction, which leads to less turnover and burnout. Improving organizational commitment requires comprehending its diverse types to regulate which commitment type is the most significant in generating the desired change in the organization (Geneviciute-Janoniene & Endruilaitiene, 2014). Organizational commitment is characterized as desire-based (affective commitment), obligation-based (normative commitment), and cost-based (Bon & Shire, 2017). To advance organizational commitment, organizations must respect the factors that affect their workers in the office (Yildirim et al., 2015). Lu et al. (2017) explained that organizational commitment improves when 9-1-1 police dispatchers have more resources to assist them, and potentially, they learn coping mechanisms to lessen burnout.

High turnover rates and understaffed 9-1-1 dispatch centers implies that the public cannot access police, fire, or emergency medical service aid efficiently when they need it (Lum, 2020b). Not only is the public affected but also the first responder because the ratio of 9-1-1 police dispatchers to service providers is too high, delayed, or low quality, which puts responders' lives in danger (Police Executive Research Forum, 2017). To

recover staffing and retain employees, 9-1-1 dispatch center managers and directors should know how to lower 9-1-1 police dispatchers' stressors to gain their organizational commitment. Relevant to the problem in 9-1-1 dispatch centers, occupational strain is defined as the emotional features of their job and the physical and social or organizational facets that 9-1-1 police dispatchers endure (Schaufeli, 2017). 9-1-1 police dispatchers' occupational demands are changing to enhance the public's ability to access 9-1-1 services (e.g., Text to 9-1-1; Baseman et al., 2018). These job demands raise work-related stress and turnover, which decrease work efficiency as well as organizational commitment in terms of an employee's level of influence, engagement, and satisfaction (Jain et al., 2013; Mercurio, 2015). Although the relationship between job demands and organizational commitment is known (Bon & Shire, 2017), unknown is how job demands among 9-1-1 police dispatchers affect their organizational commitment. Shakespeare-Finch et al. (2015) and Synard and Gazzola (2017) examined the current literature regarding the impact of understaffed 9-1-1 dispatch centers and argued that identifying coping mechanisms to decrease burnout and turnover in 9-1-1 police dispatchers is necessary.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study is to discover how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers prevent, and/or recover, from burnout. Qualitative research methods are useful in gaining a better understanding of lived experiences of persons within a subcultural group, or occupation and the subcultural group's role in society (Travis et al., 2016; Regehr et al., 2013). A phenomenology study defines the meaning of an experience both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced, which

creates opportunities to learn from the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). Exploring lived experiences of long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers is useful in understanding the coping strategies to help prevent burnout and turnover. This qualitative study involves one group in the 9-1-1 police dispatch industry, including those in radio and PSAP positions. This study will consist of 9-1-1 police dispatchers and/or supervisors within one police department in the state of Arizona and one police department in California. Although, the state of California does recognize public safety dispatchers as first responders, Arizona does not. These departments do have a similar geographical size population and safety rating. The police department in California has a geographical size of 66 square miles, the department in Arizona 69 square miles. The population of the jurisdiction in California is 272,694, with an Arizona population of 248,349. Since 2005, the police department in California has consistently been named America's safest city for violent crime per capita based on Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting statistics. The police department in Arizona is the second-safest city in America among the 100 largest cities in the nation, based on the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting statistics. The researcher interviewed ten 9-1-1 police dispatchers in total for this study to reveal the lived experiences of 9-1-1 police dispatchers to understand the stressors, bring awareness about the stressors, and develop coping skills for the stressor.

### **Significance of the Study**

Unresolved mental health issues in the United States cost American companies an upwards of \$20 billion each year in work-related Employee Assistance Program (EAP) claims (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). Psychosocial and financial problems stemming from

poor individual mental health have resulted in many organizations introducing mental health policies, programs, and broad mental health tactics (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). A research study on learning how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers use coping mechanisms can have a positive social change, which includes lessening burnout and turnover within organizations and how leaders can implement training to address new employees in managing and addressing their burnout (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). Hilal and Litsey (2020) explained that studies may also benefit leaders from other dispatch organizations to gain awareness of possible areas in their organizations that could benefit from implementing training on coping mechanisms and resources to aid newer employees from burnout and stress.

Additionally, this study may highlight relevant material for leadership training and preventing psychopathology in emergency dispatcher employees. Lilly and Pierce's (2013) study recognized that both peritraumatic distress and world expectations play significant roles in predicting post-trauma psychopathology. Benefits could include improved leadership training, clarified processes, improved morale, reduced turnover, and increased individual wellness, all from learning how to manage burnout and stress (Hilal & Litsey, 2020) since job dissatisfaction leads to burnout, less productivity, and turnover without learning coping strategies (Lee et al., 2017). Hilal and Litsey (2020) explained that those who learn how to manage their stress and burnout are more content with their occupation.

### **Significance of the Study to Leadership**

Lum (2020b) found that high job demands mean high turnover for public safety dispatchers. Finding coping mechanisms for stress and burnout helps mediate turnover;

and exposure and responses to job demands is what fuels organizational commitment (Bhatti et al., 2016). Therefore, the association between coping mechanisms, turnover, and burnout is well known (Bon & Shire, 2017). This information could help 9-1-1 center managers comprehend the fundamental reasons for turnover to decrease the ramifications of turnover, improve retention and provide coping mechanisms for newer employees (Bhatti et al., 2016). Providing or training staff in effective coping mechanisms could have budget implications, serve as a catalyst for training mandates, improve community and responder safety, and further provision reclassification of the profession as a protective service. Mandal (2018) argued the importance of addressing under-researched areas through qualitative interviews to explore diverse viewpoints and increase knowledge.

### **Methodology and Research Design Overview**

A qualitative research method from a phenomenology standpoint was used to conduct this study (Patton, 2015). Marshall and Rossman (2016) found that when researching lived experiences, phenomenology qualitative methods are appropriate. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover the coping mechanisms that long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers use to prevent/recover from burnout. This was done by examining police dispatchers who participate. Köhler et al. (2019) found qualitative research methods have a variety of methods and are flexible. Data collection consisted of video in-depth interviews with long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers who answer phones or dispatch on the radio during their shifts. The researcher coded and analyzed the data to determine patterns or themes that support the findings. The steps involving data analysis, data collection, and reporting of findings should concur

(Creswell & Poth, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Sanders (1982) listed three fundamental mechanisms in phenomenological research: (a) defining the limits of what and who is to be examined, (b) collection of data, and (c) phenomenological analysis of data. The qualitative research method is helpful in exploring the influence coping mechanisms can have to sustain long-term 9-1-1 police dispatcher career. Quantitative research methods were not considered for this study because the data collected were not numerical; hence, describing the lived experience of 9-1-1 police dispatchers who participated could not be accomplished by using a quantitative research method (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A mixed method research grounded on the mixture of qualitative and quantitative research was also not a good fit (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The purpose of the study was to describe the lived experiences of long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers without the use of comparing outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

Yeong et al. (2018) explored qualitative research and advised qualitative inquiries, including asking the kinds of questions that emphasized the why and how of human connections. Qualitative research questions need to elucidate what a researcher wants to know about the purposes and perspectives of those involved in social interactions (Yeong et al., 2018). The thoughtful and interrogative processes mandatory for developing research questions can give shape and course to a study in ways that are often undervalued (Yeong et al., 2018). This qualitative study was guided by three research questions designed to examine the perceptions of long-term 9-1-1 dispatchers' experiences:

- RQ1: What are the perceptions of the work stressors of a 9-1-1 police dispatcher?
- RQ2: How does a 9-1-1 police dispatcher describe their coping strategies to manage these stressors to prevent burnout?
- RQ3: What types of resources do 9-1-1 police dispatchers' access for their mental health/wellness? If they do not access any, or have any available, what would they like to see their department offer?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983, as cited in Dhanpat, 2016) defined emotional labor as handling one's own emotions as mandated by specific professions. Guy et al. (2015) wrote about public service occupations and explained how the data concerning the 9-1-1 police dispatchers could provide clarity about how people work in the field of public service and who has experienced emotional labor. Guy et al. (2015) described emotional labor as exertion necessitating the meeting, suppression, and/or revocation of the employees' feelings to complete the demands of their job daily. Guy et al. (2015) suggested that the display of one's emotions is a variety of individual and relational skills, including the aptitude to suggest and show emotions one does not feel, to sense the outcome of the other, and alter one's effect consequently, and to incite the wanted emotional answer from the other. Low et al. (2017) explained that emotional suppression aggravates distress and decreases cognitive performance and self-control.

Mastracci and Adams (2019) examined the possible use of scripted protocols to diminish the emotional work among 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers and found promising results. The study showed that when emergency dispatchers were happy using written

protocols, surface acting (suppressing emotion to display a predictable external effect) was reduced significantly and led to reduced emotional labor (Mastracci & Adams, 2019). However, implementing scripted protocol could harmfully affect emergency dispatchers if perceived as an invasion of their autonomy (Mastracci & Adams, 2019). Mastracci and Adams (2019) explained that the scripted protocols did not decrease turnover intention, but this is an area for further research.

Emotional labor is the on-the-job obligation to show an emotion that may be different than those emotions that are felt (Fiabane et al., 2019). Jeong et al. (2019) recommended that the obligation to present an emotion that is not being felt is a kind of acting that can negatively affect the person. Leonardsen et al. (2019) explained that in public safety dispatch centers, emotional labor is a consistent obligation as the job demands a professional demeanor, high attention to detail, and steady situational awareness due to the intricacies of the job.

### ***Cognitive Appraisal Theory***

Evidence substantiates the cognitive processing of information, such as stressful events, differing from one individual to the next, and phylogenetic inferences impacting responses to the events that a negative effect will lead to a deeper and possibly more elaborate technique of processing (Alves et al., 2017). Exposure to potentially traumatic calls could cause increased stress, anger outbursts, nightmares, flashbacks, alcohol use, and burnout in dispatchers (Adams et al., 2018). Miller et al. (2017), Ramey et al. (2016), and Smith et al. (2019) explained that exposure to traumatic events in the profession is a mutual occurrence.

Stress and coping theory include information about the fundamental aspect of cognitive appraisal in the stress process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Moos & Schaefer, 1993). Cognitive appraisal researchers clarify how individuals anticipate the outcome of a condition (Lazarus, 1966). Some define cognitive appraisal theory as a lens through which the difference between positive emotional involvements and undesirable emotional experiences present, and will often regulate or compel an individual to respond to a given set of conditions explicitly (Smith et al., 2019). Alves et al. (2015) advised that in these circumstances, the negative emotional response prevails and the negative data results in a stronger influence.

Coping efforts enable persons to apply control over damaging or intimidating situations. Highly effective persons can undertake demanding work so long as they can control the consequences by engaging in effective coping strategies, without a rigorous psychophysiological toll (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Shakespeare-Finch et al. (2015) provided initial evidence that emergency medical dispatchers recognize themselves as highly effective persons. However, persons who believe in their aptitude to exert control (e.g., have high self-efficacy) but are not effective in controlling the condition through their selected coping strategies are at bigger risk of illness and mortality, as shown by studies evaluating individuals exhibiting Type A (hostility, urgency, and high achievement) patterns of behavior or Type D (distracted with negative affectivity and social reserve) patterns of behavior (Grande et al., 2012). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) implied that the detailed designs of behavior in Type A, and seemingly Type D, individuals led to augmented mortality and illness because of the interaction between apparent effectiveness and endorsed coping strategy. Frankenhaeuser (1980)

recommended that Type A individuals require heavy workloads to remain engaged and find it problematic to cope with nonwork circumstances that include passivity, which again involves domain struggles as a possibly noteworthy stressor.

Lazarus's (2012) transactional theory of stress and coping is an appraisal theory based in the supposition that persons allocate subjective meaning to an occurrence, and subjective meaning, prejudiced by macro and micro-level factors, provokes precise response patterns and emotions. Major theoretical proposals include the communicative nature of person-environment-outcome assessment and the role of reasoning in appealing to effective coping to mediate those transactions (Lazarus, 2012). The transactional theory of stress and coping highlights the role of continuous evaluation in a dynamic person-environment association (Lazarus, 2012). From the transactional theory of stress and coping, precise antecedent, interceding process, and result variables can be examined (Lazarus, 2012). These variables have found substantial application across the literature on traumatic stress but have not been scrutinized within the background of a theoretical model that may clarify relations to post-trauma consequences in 9-1-1 dispatchers (Miller et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2019). 9-1-1 dispatchers serve as the first line of response in emergency and emergent circumstances, yet their experiences are often unnoticed or minimized (Baseman et al., 2018). Adams et al. (2018) explained that the lack of understanding of post-trauma distress in emergency 9-1-1 dispatchers further underlines the necessity to inspect critical factors that increase risk and resilience so that those who defend both civilians and other first responders can flourish.

### Study Limitations

Limitations are the recognized weaknesses of this study (Eagle et al., 2012). The limitations of the research may be unrestrained factors or those related to the researcher's selections; nonetheless, they must be recognized to present the context and scope of the research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). One limitation of the results of this research study results from the low number of participants, only including 9-1-1 police dispatchers, and the location. Doody et al., (2016) explained that there is a gap in 9-1-1 dispatch job explanations and accessible research within the 9-1-1 profession. Though the APCO International (2018) has attempted to write industry standards and best practices, none are commonly acknowledged in the profession. Further, this study only included 9-1-1 police dispatchers from two similarly sized cities and no other law enforcement or fire dispatcher counterparts. An additional limitation is that participants may have integrated personal biases into the responses provided during the interview. Researcher bias could be as another limitation of the study because of the researcher's personal connection to the 9-1-1- long-term dispatcher role.

One way to reduce the impact of the limitations on the research results was to create trustworthiness with p by building a relationship that produced open and honest answers. Bracketing was used to mitigate any prejudices made by the researcher's current 9-1-1 police dispatcher experience. Patton (2015) stated that bracketing involves the following steps:

1. Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phases and declarations that speak straight to the phenomenon in question
2. Interpret the meaning of these expressions as a knowledgeable reader

3. Obtain the subject's understanding of these phases, if possible
4. Review the meanings for what they reveal about the important, recurrent features of the phenomenon being studied; and
5. Offer a cautious statement, or description, of the phenomenon in terms of the important recurrent features recognized in Step 4.

### **Study Delimitations**

The research recognized the delimitations to categorize the scope of the research being undertaken and any boundaries that may exist due to adjustable selection, methodology, design, instrumentation, or other factors involved (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations consist of restrictions that investigators create to control the scope of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). To alleviate the possibility of any biases based on the researcher's current 9-1-1 police dispatcher experience, bracketing will be used. The phenomenology study will be delimited to a specific target population to include only long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers trained for three or more years to work for the police department. It will also be delimited to two police departments in the Southwest United States. Including dispatchers from other agencies could create a lack of understanding of police procedures for other dispatchers. The perspectives of 9-1-1 police dispatchers may not represent the overall opinion of the participating center or other 9-1-1 police dispatchers in their own centers or nationwide. For example, fire and highway patrol dispatch centers work as secondary PSAPs. However, police departments serve as primary PSAPs. Therefore, the findings and results may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, locations, or future time periods.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

To further present the topic, some key terms require specialized definition so that the reader may become oriented with the field of 9-1-1 police dispatch. This list is not exhaustive but rather clarifies reoccurring words and language (Collins et al., 2018).

*9-1-1* The three-digit national emergency number is used by the public to access public safety agencies (National Emergency Number Association, 2018).

*9-1-1 police dispatcher* An individual presently employed in a police PSAP. This position is also referred to as dispatcher and telecommunicator. These persons are accountable for operating telephones, radios, and other communication systems to receive, organize, and relay needs for emergency services under the standard occupational classifications system (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

*APCO* The APCO, created in 1935, is the world's oldest and largest organizations of public safety communications professionals. The association supports its members, and the public by providing industry knowledge, professional growth, technical assistance, advocacy, and outreach (APCO International, 2018).

*Burnout* Exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation, usually because of prolonged stress or frustration, affects efficacy in different scenarios (Montero-Marin et al., 2016).

*Coping Mechanisms* How individuals handle stress (Bonner & Brimhall, 2021).

*First Responder* Includes a firefighter, law enforcement officer, paramedic, emergency medical technician, or other individual (including an employee of a legally organized and recognized volunteer organization, whether compensated or not), who, during his or her professional duties, responds to fire, medical, hazardous material, or

other similar emergencies (Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, 1968). Nineteen states have added Public Safety Dispatcher, or Public Safety Telecommunicator, under the definition of a first responder.

*Mental health* Emotional, psychological, and social well-being, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Parekh, 2018).

*Peer support* A program that provides one-on-one support (e.g., emotional, social, practical) and referrals to professional services as needed (IACP, 2020).

*Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)* This is a mental health condition that is activated by a frightening event—either experiencing it or witnessing it (Shalev et al., 2017). Symptoms may comprise flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event (Shalev et al., 2017).

*Public safety answering point (PSAP)* A 9-1-1 center is an emergency dispatch center or agency call center that receives 9-1-1 calls (National Emergency Number Association, 2018).

*Stress* A physical, chemical, or emotional factor causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation (Stress, n.d.).

*Turnover* The voluntary or involuntary departure of an employee from an organization and then that vacancy is replaced with another employee (Arokiasamy, 2013).

*Vicarious trauma* Unique from secondary PTSD because it matures over a longer period, signs are usually more pervasive or sometimes permanent, and changes can disturb identity, self-perception, spirituality, and worldview (Foreman, 2018).

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the perceptions of the coping strategies of long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers. This qualitative study is designed to discover how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers prevent and/or recover from burnout. Exploring lived experiences of long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers will be useful in understanding the stressors present and finding coping mechanisms to assist in preventing, or lessening, burnout in newer employees. In this chapter, the researcher provided the background of the study, problem statement, and purpose statement. Furthermore, the researcher outlined the research questions as well as the theoretical framework that directed the progress of the proposed study. The researcher also discussed the study's potential significance and how it could impact leadership in the industry. Finally, the chapter included a discussion of the delimitations and limitations. Chapter 2 includes the literature review in which the researcher will review the culture of emergency dispatchers, stress, burnout vicarious trauma, mental health, coping tactics, and peer support.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A 9-1-1 police dispatcher responds to emergency and nonemergency calls and organizes the responses of law enforcement officers into crime, medical, and accident scene categories (Lum et al., 2020a). Typically, 9-1-1 police dispatchers use two-way radio systems to communicate information to officers and to contact other emergency personnel, such as firefighters and paramedics, respond to calls, and offer additional support as required (Lum et al., 2020b). Lum et al. (2020b) explained that 9-1-1 police dispatchers aid officers by responding to queries about situations involving issues with driver's licenses or warrants. Additionally, 9-1-1 police dispatchers log incoming calls during a shift, enter warrants, document information about stolen vehicles and articles, and address issues relating to car impounds. The review of the literature examined the existing information on emergency dispatchers. The researcher will explore the culture of emergency dispatchers, stress and the various effects of burnout, vicarious trauma, emergency dispatchers' mental health, coping tactics, and peer support programs.

### **Culture of Emergency Dispatchers**

Police culture can be defined as a set of norms, values, and shared outlooks that guide an employee and their behavior (Demirkol & Nalla, 2019). Characteristically, police culture relates to negative values such as dishonesty, cynicism, prejudice, distrust, and authoritarianism due to the working environment (Demirkol & Nalla, 2019). Cordoner (2017) pointed out that police culture, which contrasts from organization to organization, is diverse in every police department. Police organizations need to evolve into cultures wherein employees try to defend one another and look out for each other's physical and mental health. Jablonowski (2017) explained that police organizational

culture nurtures their subgroups and well-being, enhancing work environment and the greater mindfulness of a helpful organizational culture. Its subgroups can be viewed as key features of accomplishment by health-enhancing working circumstances and supporting the long-time performance of the organization's employees.

Public safety communicators work in challenging environments requiring them to make decisions about life-threatening emergencies quickly and accurately (Golding et al., 2017; Leonardsen et al., 2019). Public safety communicator requires the precise gathering of information and delivery of lifesaving or life safety instructions until law enforcement, fire department, or medical services personnel arrive on the scene (Erbay et al., 2018). Farzinnia et al. (2018) found that as part of the life survival chain, communicators may not respond to incidents physically, but they are the first person dealing with the emergency and are widely considered the first, first responder.

As with other first responders such as firefighters and law enforcement personnel, the high-stress atmosphere in which public safety communicators operate can take its toll both mentally and physically (Bedini et al., 2017; Golding et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2019). In some cases, when public safety communicators are repeatedly exposed to human trauma-related incidents over the phone, the result is a range of debilitating effects including obesity, anxiety, depression, high levels of stress, and PTSD (Carleton et al., 2018; Klimley et al., 2018). Carleton et al. (2018) stated that 88% of communicators who are exposed to human trauma incidents over the phone one to five times in their career show signs of emotional or mental health disorders. Meischke et al. (2015) advised that given the difficulties and setting of their work, 9-1-1 dispatchers may be at higher risk for

a broad range of physical and mental health consequences due to secondary exposure to traumatic events and physical and situational characteristics.

In Ramey et al.'s (2016) literature review in their quantitative study, they indicated that at least 17% of public safety communicators suffered from amplified psychological stress, and more notably, 31% suffered from PTSD. The authors also stated that 8% of frontline law enforcement personnel suffered from PTSD. Ramey et al. (2016) attributed the much higher prevalence of PTSD in public safety communicators to repeated exposure to human trauma over the phone, with no pathway for obtaining a resolution whereby some first responders may obtain that resolution. Though job demands are prevalent, they are not the only factors contributing to employee turnover or turnover intentions (Ramey et al., 2016). Ramey et al. (2016) noted the importance of considering the environmental and physical environments of the workplace to better appreciate how employee turnover can develop in the population of interest.

The work environment of public safety communicators varies by jurisdiction and agency; but for this study, the differences are insignificant. Alsharari et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative correlational study discussing employees working overnight shifts in what is commonly referred to as shift work. Alsharari et al. (2021) found that employees working overnights with consistent exposure to artificial light had noteworthy negative physical, psychological, and physiological impairments, including sleep-related issues and respiratory problems. Public safety communicators work primarily in low and artificial light conditions, especially during overnight hours, mainly due to the number of computers being monitored at one time (Alsharari et al., 2021). A quantitative correlational study conducted by Carleton et al. (2018) found that public safety personnel

who work principally in a seated position and who experience continuous exposure to high levels of stress may experience undesirable effects such as chronic body pain, social anxiety, or depression, which can lead to decreased job satisfaction and lower quality of life (Carleton et al., 2018). Miller et al. (2017) explained that even with the negative effects associated with the job, tens of thousands of public safety communicators report to work each day with one goal: protecting lives and property in their communities.

In addition to the physical and mental effects that public safety communicators experience because of repeated exposure to human trauma, high levels of stress, and fast-paced work environment, they require specific skills and knowledge to perform their job, including the capability to envisage the emergency scene rapidly and properly to determine which resources are needed for response (Linderoth et al., 2019). On medical calls, the public safety communicator must triage the emergency over the phone to determine if the patient is awake and breathing and to classify the exact nature of the medical emergency (Riou et al., 2017; Riou et al., 2018). Linderoth et al. (2019) discovered that the ability to properly triage a medical call is a skill requiring training in medical terminology, levels of consciousness, and proper call handling techniques such as repetitive persistence and active calming techniques.

Law enforcement and fire department calls require the public safety communicator to swiftly evaluate the type of emergency and determine if the emergency scene is safe for first responders (Venet et al., 2018). The attention to detail essential to performing the job and highlights the requirement to monitor multiple tasks and appropriately identify and react to incoming information from callers and first responders such as law enforcement personnel, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians

(Riou et al., 2017; Riou et al., 2018). The public safety communicator constantly makes choices that require clarity of thought and attention to detail, such as selecting the most appropriate unit for a response (Riou et al., 2017; Riou et al., 2018; Venet et al., 2018). Public safety communicators aim to send the most appropriate unit to the emergency scene in the shortest amount of time (Venet et al., 2018). Venet et al. (2018) found that having a robust skill set is a job requirement that is cultivated by the individual employee and the organization.

However, other factors, such as the employees' pay scale, are in the hands of the organization and the leaders of the governing body alone. Indeed, the APCO (2018) noted that some public safety communicators are not paid as well as their private sector counterparts. Public safety communicators' pay scale is notable because the expectations are to learn new skills with the implementation of new technologies, leading to more stress and less job engagement (APCO, 2018). Additionally, public safety communicators deal with life and death emergencies while their private sector counterparts devote time to customer service or technical support issues (APCO, 2018). Holroyd (2020) found that while leaders within the public safety communications industry agree that the public safety communicator is a vital resource for the public safety industry, one constraint is that governmental budgets are subject to the political realities of the communities in which they operate.

The combination of negative aspects of the job, high-stress levels, and lower-than-average pay scales can be contributory factors to high employee turnover within the public safety communications industry (Shin & Jeung, 2019). As a result of high employee turnover, agencies experience increased training costs, difficulty in filling open

shifts, mandatory overtime, and loss of highly skilled employees with long-term knowledge and experience (Shin & Jeung, 2019). Future expansion of services related to 9-1-1 emergency calls such as text to 9-1-1 and video to 9-1-1 will undoubtedly increase the stress levels experienced by public safety communicators. Rapid technological advancement in public safety communications centers may add to the already problematic rates of employee turnover in the industry (Neustaedter et al., 2019). Shin and Jeung (2019) and Neustaedter et al. (2019) argued that to fully understand the impact of employee turnover and employee turnover intention on the public safety communications industry, it is helpful to understand the dynamics of employee turnover intention and the most influential factors.

### **Staffing Crisis**

To understand the crisis surrounding emergency dispatch staffing levels, it is necessary to investigate current circumstances in centers across the United States. For example, Segall (2020) found that in Marion County, Indiana, the Marion County Sheriff's Office had budgeted for 152 full-time dispatch positions but only had 126 filled. Additionally, due to the national COVID-19 pandemic, 23 dispatchers had resigned or retired, and 28 had to quarantine during the year (Segall, 2020). This significant staffing shortage resulted in 911 callers waiting on hold for as long as six minutes, but the national standard is that 90% of all 911 calls be answered within ten seconds (Segall, 2020). In one case, the delay in answering 911 calls resulted in an ambulance arriving 16 minutes after the 911 call was initiated for a patient in atrial fibrillation, which caused a loss of oxygen to the brain.

Similar staffing problems in dispatch centers have been reported in other areas around the country. The *Times of Northwest Indiana* in Lake County, Indiana, reported that the dispatch center was budgeted for 100 full-time dispatchers, but only 73 were cleared to work (Racke, 2019). An audit by the Berkeley City Auditor (2019) found that their dispatch center was short one full-time 911 dispatcher per shift, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, reported 21 telecommunicator vacancies (Learn-Andes, 2020), and Austin, Texas reported 28 vacancies (Rucker, 2020). Similar reports were made in Nashville, Tennessee, short 41 positions (Wallace, 2020) and Albany, New York, 16 vacancies (DeFeciani, 2020). Only one article indicated staffing levels had returned to normal after the Covid-19 pandemic in Trumbull County, Ohio. However, it was noted that overtime hours were still high because one employee was in quarantine, and seven others were new hires still being trained for the job (Fox, 2020). Segall (2020), DeFeciani (2020), and Wallace (2020) agreed that each of these reports noted problems with answering 911 calls promptly, requiring full-time dispatchers to take on as many as 16 hours of overtime per week, or 300 hours per week center-wide (Berkeley City Auditor, 2019), dissatisfaction with pay, long training periods (Pickens, 2020), and low employee morale.

### **Stress of Emergency Dispatchers and Impacts**

Few studies address stress among 9-1-1 police dispatchers, thus the need for an in-depth examination of this problem (Boothroyd et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2019). Much of the research covering the law enforcement community comprises mainly of law enforcement officers or other first responders, such as firefighters and paramedics (Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). Smith et al. (2019), Miller et al. (2017), and Ramey et al. (2016) advocated for studies that cross-analyze first responders

and 9-1-1 police dispatchers. Existing research includes addressing the effects of stress in dispatchers while exposure to traumatic events in the profession also occurs.

Job stress is mainly psychological, which leads workers to remove themselves emotionally from the work (Lu et al., 2017; Lambert et al., 2018). Reasons for job stress in the emergency dispatch center include pressure to achieve and meet goals, a lack of independence, call center environmental circumstances, leadership, sustenance and secrecy, and a division between dispatchers and responders (Gurevich et al., 2018). Moreover, public safety dispatchers work not only 8-hour shifts but also 10 and sometimes 12 hours or more (Perez, 2021). Perez (2021) specified that the longer the shift, the more performance declines. Bethea et al. (2020) described how during these long shifts, watching numerous screens, and dealing with multiple callers of diverse ages and cultures, the workflow is fast paced, technologically rigorous, and under incessant supervision.

Continuous exposure to the traumatic circumstances involved in 9-1-1 call taking and dispatch such as burnout and compassion fatigue are indications of public safety dispatch distress (Trachik et al., 2015). Without job reserve interference, public safety dispatchers lose their emotional obligation (Chae & Meischke, 2021). Job demands are the reason for fatigue and, subsequently, turnover (Chae & Meischke, 2021; Huynh et al., 2014). Gunawardena (2019) stated that job stress is the result of job responsibilities, while job demands are the influence of job responsibilities.

Emergency service professions are integrally stressful and expressively challenging (Büssing et al., 2017; Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; Coldridge & Davies, 2017; de Visser et al., 2016; Ménard & Arter, 2014; Regehr et al., 2013). Contact with

traumatic and critical events (e.g., events external to the normal range of involvement that have the potential to overcome one's coping devices), irregular eating and sleeping schedules, long and revolving shifts, incomplete or no breaks, obligatory overtime, working holidays, loss of time with family and friends, family resentment due to missing holidays, joining with interior weights of management and other outside factors lend toward the occupation's stressors (Brunstad et al., 2016; Carleton et al., 2018; Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; Coldridge & Davies, 2017; Huang et al., 2015; Ménard & Arter, 2014; Pelsler et al., 2016). Stressors can be constant and incessant, or they can be a singular event with residual effects (Brunstad et al., 2016; Carleton et al., 2018; de Visser et al., 2016; Southwick et al., 2014). Büssing et al. (2017), Carleton et al. (2018), and de Visser et al. (2016) described lack of support from administration, poor communication among colleagues, disregard by answering units (e.g., police officers, paramedics, and firefighters), and continuous media inspection as extra stressors.

Calls tend to be random in harshness, extent, and volume, necessitating that 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers be observant, engaged, and attentive to the particulars (e.g., knowing what relevant info to comprise in calls and dispatch communications) while working inside the agency's rules and events (Brunstad et al., 2016; Regehr et al., 2013; Stafford, 2016). Emergency dispatchers are characteristically in sedentary positions that can lead to unfortunate health circumstances, such as obesity (Anshel et al., 2013; Büssing et al., 2017; Carleton et al., 2018).

### **Effects of Stress**

Chronic stress causes emotional and physical consequences for emergency service workers. Though many studies have observed frontline responders (e.g., firefighters,

police officers, and paramedics), few studies have found that 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers experience comparable effects when unprotected from these job-related stressors (Huang et al., 2015; Lilly & Allen, 2015). Exposure to hypothetically traumatic events in the work-related setting has been connected to PTSD and Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD) in sworn workers, though the effects on 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers have been significantly understudied (Beck et al., 2015; Carleton et al., 2018; Coldridge & Davies, 2017; Cohen et al., 2017; de Visser et al., 2016; Kintzle et al., 2013; Kulkarni et al., 2013; Pierce & Lilly, 2012; Smoktunowicz et al., 2015; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014). Beck et al. (2015), Büssing et al. (2017), Carleton et al. (2018), Cohen et al. (2017), and Coldridge & Davies (2017) agreed that STSD has many names, including vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, burnout, and countertransference, and can influence those who are unprotected from trauma.

Pierce and Lilly (2012) discovered the connection between duty-related trauma and PTSD potential in 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers. Though 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers are physically distant from the scene of the event, they have little control over the event as it unfolds. Emergency dispatchers encounter a variability of call types, including domestic violence, suicide, parking problems, property calls, assault, and medical emergencies (Lilly & Allen, 2015; Regehr et al., 2013). PTSD and STSD have similar symptomology (Carleton et al., 2018; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014). They both comprise symptoms such as expressive numbing, avoidance, hyperarousal, depression, anxiety (Kulkarni et al., 2013; Sheen et al., 2015; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014). Carleton et al. (2018) and Sheen et al. (2015) explained PTSD is connected to a singular event one

experiences, while STSD affects those who aid those who experience disturbing events unswervingly (e.g., crisis workers).

The four phases of both PTSD and STSD development are: the outline of the stressor, re-experiencing the disturbing event, evading, or numbing of reminders, and tenacious arousal (Carleton et al., 2018; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014). One example of a traumatic event or stressor that activates PTSD or STSD symptomology is a call or radio transmission that is external to normal human involvement and is upsetting to the general populace, such as an officer-involved shooting (Regehr et al., 2013; Sheen et al., 2015; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014). A person who is repeatedly exposed to traumatic events either shows the symptomology of traumatic stress ailments (e.g., reliving the events through memories or dreams, dodging enjoyable activities, depression, hostility, or nervousness) or develops effective coping skills that builds resilience (de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Thieleman & Cacciatore, 2014). Thieleman and Cacciatore (2014) found chronic contact with traumatic events can decrease 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers' capacity for understanding callers and other emergency service workers.

During call processing, callers may cycle in their exhibition of feelings (e.g., calm, distressed, heated enthusiasm). Emergency dispatchers must remain in control of their feelings while calmly producing the information required to regulate a suitable emergency or nonemergency reply (Regehr et al., 2013; Thieleman & Cacciatore, 2014). Regehr et al. (2013) and Upadyaya et al. (2016) found that while gathering, processing, and distributing the info, 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers must deliver calming methods and orders to the callers to safeguard their protection.

Supplementary stressors affecting workers include the battle between work and home responsibilities. Work projects and shift changes can disturb a worker's work-life stability (McCarty, 2013; Thieleman & Cacciatore, 2014). Work assignments, shift descriptions, and worker obtainability are subject to change with little or no announcement (Regehr et al., 2013; Thieleman & Cacciatore, 2014). Regehr et al. (2013) and Waudby and Poulston (2017) found that feelings of annoyance and stress joined with feelings of sexism and gender role changes in the workplace can also produce anger.

### **Workplace Stress**

Workplace stress is among the most researched topics associated with employee turnover intention (Tetteh et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020). Zhang and Li (2020) conducted a quantitative study and found that stress can be mitigated by increasing job autonomy or job crafting. Beck et al., (2015) found that a strong show of support from the organization or immediate supervisors also decreases workplace stress. And Ababneh (2020) conducted a quantitative study finding that without supervisors' support, stress develops from an employee's perceptions, including not having personal and professional expectations met by their supervision or organization. Ababneh (2020) also found high levels of supervisors' support were an important mitigating aspect that can lead to lower voluntary turnover intentions. Ababneh (2020) advised workplace stress is caused by multiple factors but can also be a reason for other antecedents of employee turnover intentions.

Workplace stress can be a precursor to other causes of employee turnover intentions such as job burnout, also referred to as emotional exhaustion (Dwinijanti et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Job burnout, as defined by Barthauer et al. (2020), is the

prolonged sense of exhaustion accompanied by a detectable detachment from the job being performed. As a variable in a quantitative study by Mahoney et al. (2020), job burnout was investigated in conjunction with job satisfaction. Mahoney et al. (2020) indicated that the negative effects of job burnout could be mitigated by an increase in overall job satisfaction. But workplace stress is not the only cause of employee burnout, as multiple researchers have shown that work overload is a central factor as well (Cho et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2018). According to Kubayi (2018), work overload includes those situations when the job expectations are more complex than the available resources. Kubayi (2018) discovered workplace stress and work excess are two areas that influence current research, but numerous variables are complex and interact.

### **Burnout of Emergency Dispatchers**

American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger coined the term burnout, which refers to exhausting a person because of unnecessary strains on one's resources (as cited in Johnstone et al., 2016). Burnout can affect a person's personal life, including the company in which they work, because of reduced work quality, lack of patient/client gratification, and low employee retention (Johnstone et al., 2016). The 9-1-1 police dispatcher's job stress can be a reason for burnout (Guy et al., 2015). Burnout leads to disengagement from work, an inability to maintain a viewpoint, a sense of desperation, apathy, or sadness, and a lack of belief (Guy et al., 2015). Bethea et al. (2020) linked stress related to work duties, such as emergencies, the observation of insufficient downtime between calls to recharge, other clerical duties, long hours and mandatory overtime, and a chaotic work situation directly to burnout in 9-1-1- police dispatchers.

Job burnout is defined as a lengthy response to work stressors when the worker may face not only stressors but also lack of control, tiredness, and feelings of helplessness (Cieslak et al., 2014; Maslach et al., 2019). Job burnout can lead to callouts, long-term sickness, and resignations further distressing the call center management (Mellor et al., 2015). Sickness absences for workers who report job exhaustion are associated with workers who indicate job worn-out (Hallsten et al., 2011; Mellor et al., 2015), defined by Hallsten et al. (2011) as staff with a high exhaustion-cynicism state, affected by work circumstances. Hallsten et al. (2011), McCarty and Skogan (2012), and Maslach et al. (2001) advised that this data is based on research addressing the association between job burnout and job worn-out, and how it affects workers' short-term or long-term sick absenteeism.

McCarty and Skogan (2012) considered the variance between civilian and sworn personnel and how they are affected by burnout due to job pressure and work situations. To determine if any changes imitated workers' performance and well-being as well as to account for the effects of these variables, a study included information used to measure burnout, health, and job gratification (McCarty & Skogan, 2012). Workers who experience secondary traumatic stress circumstances have exhibited indications of job burnout as well as job discontent (Cieslak et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2016). McCarty and Skogan's (2012) study found that although the variance between civilians and sworn personnel was not statistically important, civilians rated a bit higher than sworn personnel in terms of reporting levels of burnout on the job. Also, civilian law enforcement employees, when compared with sworn officers, presented little change in their feelings of burnout (McCarty & Skogan, 2012). Cieslak et al. (2014) and Mellor et

al. (2015) explained that the study found a connection between job stressors and job burnout among personnel in law enforcement; burnout had a result on job performance, supervisory support awareness, and turnover.

Cieslak et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis to show the association between job exhaustion and stress. The authors explored the literature to determine the penalties of being unprotected from trauma indirectly and how personnel dealt with it. The investigators used the term secondary traumatic stress to explore preceding education that dealt with participants whose job explanation comprised dealing with customers who had been victims of trauma (Cieslak et al., 2014). Cieslak et al. (2014), Hallsten et al. (2011), and McCarty and Skogan (2012) agreed that the study presented a high correlation between stress, job burnout, and a person's exposure to others' traumatic events, which supported information from other studies.

Russell et al. (2014) managed a paper-based survey measuring variables of transformational guidance, burnout, stress, and coping strategies among 482 police officers. The outcomes showed that officers who were able to detach themselves from traumatic events, seen or worked, had higher levels of burnout and stress. The officers' ability to distance themselves from the condition might have been considered a coping skill if a consequence had not been high levels of depersonalization. Miller et al. (2017) and Russell et al. (2014) added kind managers' transformational leadership had a large impact on how the participants performed on the job, which reinforces information from other studies that emphasized the significance of administrative support.

Burnout, characterized by exhaustion, indifference, and a reduced sense of individual accomplishment, is a tremendous barrier to the preservation of healthy work

settings for persons in highly demanding professions such as law enforcement (Bethea et al., 2020). Stress associated with labor duties, the awareness of not having enough time to complete tasks and other assigned duties, and a disordered work setting are directly connected to burnout syndrome in workers (Bethea et al., 2020). Employee turnover in police departments is a noteworthy issue and the main forecasters for job turnover are job satisfaction and organizational obligation (Hilal & Litsey, 2020; Wareham et al., 2015). Li and Brown (2019) discovered that high turnover can decrease workforce confidence, raise the workload demand on enduring workers, and contribute to insufficient staffing, possibly resulting in reducing the worth of an organization's amenities.

Wareham et al. (2015) clarified that turnover costs are much more complex for police departments than for other organizations. Hilal and Litsey (2020) discovered that losing a competitive applicant in the workforce costs the organization somewhere from one to five times the worker's salary. Additional direct costs comprise recruitment efforts, screening, and choosing of new hires, background checks, medical assessments, psychological assessments, uniforms and equipment, training of new hires, overtime of staff filling vacant positions, and other organizational costs (Wareham et al., 2015). Wareham et al. (2015) revealed that unintended costs can build up, such as a decrease in the excellence of service, reduced efficiency, and loss of specialized knowledge, skills, and experience.

### **Vicarious Trauma of Emergency Dispatchers**

Vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, or compassion fatigue aid in describing the effects on individuals who work with individuals who have directly encountered the stressors of 9-1-1 police dispatchers (Regehr et al., 2013; Sattler et al.,

2014). The traumatic occasion's occurrence and sternness can vary from one person to another as well as the occurrence and severity of the opposing effects (Foreman, 2018; Lewis & King, 2019; Regehr et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2016). The results from numerous studies indicated how adults in the United States have experienced trauma at some point in their lives (Cosden et al., 2016; Foreman, 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). Foreman (2018), Halevi and Idisis (2018), and Taylor et al. (2016) showed that 9-1-1 police dispatchers undergo repeated exposure to the traumatic experiences of their callers and/or answering employees.

9-1-1 emergency dispatcher are repeatedly unprotected from the traumatic experiences of their callers and/or responding employees (Foreman, 2018; Halevi & Idisis, 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). Vicarious trauma, or secondary traumatic stress, can happen when a person is compassionately involved with or harmfully affected by hearing about another person's traumatic actions (Boulanger, 2018; Cosden et al., 2016; Decker et al., 2015; Foreman, 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). Cynicism, withdrawal, anxiety, depression, incapability to cope, hyperarousal, and condensed work volume or efficiency can be noticeable in persons with higher levels of vicarious trauma if left unprocessed (Cosden et al., 2016; Foreman, 2018; Rivera, 2015). Persons with better coping skills handle the effects of vicarious trauma much more efficiently than those deprived of a coping or wellness plan and therefore they have an improved superiority in both individual and professional life (Cosden et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Foreman, 2018; Halevi & Idisis, 2018; Regehr et al., 2013). Cosden et al. (2016), Foreman (2018), Lewis and King (2019), and Vorell and Carmack (2014) defined variables for vicarious trauma as the worker's supervisory relationships, employees support (e.g., debriefing

room, kitchenette, refrigerators), job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, peer relationships, social support, absence of training for work-related trauma, assignments, or work hours.

Vicarious trauma can be circumvented or indications lessened when persons have the proper exercise and coping skills to handle the stressors, which can assist in building resilience (Boulanger, 2018; Folwell & Kauer 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). Post-traumatic growth can occur (Taylor et al., 2016), therefore, agencies should recognize the emotional risks and possible triggers for vicarious trauma, classify training suitable to decrease the influence on workers, and/or reflect a mentoring or official therapy program (Grise-Owens et al., 2018; Lewis & King, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016). One debatable factor conducive to vicarious trauma is the experience of detachment a person is from the traumatic event (e.g., on the phone and not in person; Taylor et al., 2016). Some contend that distance is a defensive factor while others counter by saying it raises feelings of powerlessness as one cannot interfere and physically help (Decker et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016). Another factor possibly contributing to vicarious trauma is the requirement to remain calm and in control while being visible to the stressor (e.g., taking a call that would induce an expressive reply such as one concerning a child; Taylor et al., 2016). Emergency dispatchers must endure unbiassed, assumed, and kind while processing calls for service; their involvements, beliefs, relations, and values must not be measured while processing the call for service (Taylor et al., 2016). Regehr et al. (2013) and Taylor et al. (2016) found that more research was conducted on occupations that are physically exposed rather than those that are expressively exposed, like 9-1-1 police dispatchers.

## **Mental Health of Emergency Dispatchers**

Many indications, including stress, impact 9-1-1 police dispatchers that could fit the criteria for the analysis of a mental illness (Allen et al., 2016; Lilly & Allen, 2015). A few studies have made a connection between the mental health of sworn personnel, law enforcement officers, and non-sworn personnel, civilians, in law enforcement activities (Carleton et al., 2018; Klimley et al., 2018). Carleton et al. (2018), Hegg-Deloye et al. (2013), Lilly and Allen (2015) Lilly et al. (2016), concurred that mental health illnesses to consider consist of PTSD, depression, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, alcohol use disorder, and anxiety between law enforcement workers and other first responders.

In addition to stress, 9-1-1 police dispatchers may be affected by a variety of indications that could fit the standards for the diagnosis of a mental illness. Several studies have associated mental health among sworn personnel (law enforcement officers) and non-sworn personnel (civilians) in law enforcement departments (Carleton et al., 2018; Klimley et al., 2018). Disorders such as PTSD, depression, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, alcohol use disorder, and anxiety between law enforcement employees and other first responders have been considered (Carleton et al., 2018; Hegg-Deloye et al., 2013; Lilly & Allen, 2015; Lilly et al., 2016; Lilly & Pierce, 2013). Carleton et al. (2018), Lilly & Allen (2015) Mellor et al. (2015), and Ramey et al. (2016) found research in this area has formed the consciousness of how law enforcement personnel are affected by the day-to-day cases meeting and how these affect the workers' competence in the performance of their responsibilities.

Lilly and Pierce (2013) conducted research concerning 9-1-1 dispatchers that addressed PTSD and depression symptoms in this population. This study intended to

evaluate symptoms of PTSD knowledgeable during the month beforehand the survey was given to the participants (Lilly & Pierce, 2013). The study showed that the dispatchers who had described symptoms of distress and depression had an undesirable view of the world as well as of themselves, with a low sense of self-esteem and a high level of anguish. These consequences were comparable to the conclusions of other researchers (Allen et al., 2016; Haugen et al., 2012; Lilly & Pierce, 2013). Lilly and Pierce's (2013) study were the first time that researchers led a study on 9-1-1 dispatchers emphasizing depression and PTSD (Lilly & Pierce, 2013; Lilly & Allen, 2015). According to the researchers, the 9-1-1 population is exposed to trauma daily due to their work. The study reinforced other findings of the positive association between exposure to trauma and PTSD and depression among 9-1-1 dispatchers (Allen et al., 2016; Lilly & Allen, 2015). Allen et al. (2016) and Lilly and Allen (2015) noted a limitation of the study was that this was the first of its kind but a longitudinal study could help recognize how this population could be additionally assisted to circumvent emerging symptoms of PTSD and depression.

Haugen et al. (2012) conducted an evaluation of the literature about the treatment of PTSD in first responders concentrating on the occupation responsibilities that encompassed high work demands such as long shifts and exposure to traumatic events. The study mandated that the participants had established prior psychological treatment for a PTSD diagnosis for first responders and identifies PTSD as the main mental health grievance (Haugen et al., 2012). Allen et al. (2016) found that treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy and rational-emotive therapy were most effective in treating

PTSD. Researchers have shown that job duty and PTSD symptoms in first responders are highly connected.

A study that sought to recognize physiological stress and psychological distress among dispatchers found a strong connotation between anxiety and depression (Regehr et al., 2013). This study, which served as a basis for the Allen et al. (2016) study, stressed how high stress affects dispatchers. The PTSD rate among workers in the study was 31%; dispatchers stated symptoms at a rate four times higher than the symptoms described by sworn employees (Regehr et al., 2013). This data agrees with several studies analyzed by Hegg-Deloye et al. (2013), in which paramedics showed a high incidence of symptoms associated with stress such as PTSD, sleeping difficulties, amplified obesity, and cardiovascular disease. Regehr et al. (2013) discovered that since 9-1-1 dispatchers are the first respondents, they are unprotected from the same shiftwork calendars and emergency services work setting as paramedics, police officers, and firefighters.

The Allen et al. (2016) study measured the properties of coping skills of eight-hundred and eight 9-1-1 dispatchers who were victims of childhood trauma before working in a 9-1-1 call center where they were unprotected from traumatic situations. The nature of the occupation comprised the need to work diverse hours with overtime and shift schedules. The study showed that 9-1-1 dispatchers had diverse coping strategies that assisted them in dealing with traumatic events regardless of their previous exposure to traumatic actions (Allen et al., 2016). Allen et al. (2016) and Regehr et al. (2013) explained that the approaches the dispatchers used most were endeavoring to modify the current condition, distancing themselves from the situation, self-controlling, looking for social support via colleagues or supervisors, accepting accountability for the position of

the situation, escape-avoidance coping mechanism, problematic solving, and/or positive reassessment.

Carleton et al. (2018) examined symptoms of mental disorders in public employees (correctional workers, dispatchers, firefighters, paramedics, and police officers). The results showed a high correlation between the duties of each position, such as answering emergency calls, providing emergency medical help, and de-escalating unpredictable circumstances, and the participants' symptoms reported, and that the civilian participants described a higher rate of symptoms than sworn personnel in every measure except the alcohol use scale (Carleton et al., 2018). Boothroyd et al. (2018) and Klimley et al. (2018) suggested that these outcomes agree with other studies in which the civilian population in emergency services described higher rates of symptoms of mental distress and worse mental health.

Stigma about mental illness and looking for help for it remains, particularly among police employees. Karaffa and Tochkov (2013) found that the stigma related to seeking out mental health services among police officers and the public is harmfully correlated. Furthermore, Karaffa and Tochkov (2013) described how police employees often undervalued their coworkers' inclination to seek mental health services for an array of mental health problems. The stigma among police employees versus the overall public surrounding conversing or reporting mental health issues is possibly due to the nature of police work. For example, an officer who pursues assistance for a mental health-related problem may lose out on a promotion, be placed on clerical duty, or have their firearm removed, which may also mean a loss of standing for some (Crowe et al., 2015).

Watson and Andrews (2018) have also found that the utmost barrier to police employees reaching out for assistance is the possible harm it may cause to their career as well as anxiety that their coworkers will lose confidence, and consequently faith, in them, which is also tied to organizational stigma. Crowe et al. (2015) found that doubt, judgment, and shame were predominant among the general population and first responders when self-reporting mental health problems; moreover, persons do not come forward out of fear that others will think they are faking because mental illness cannot be seen. These fears are acceptable, as mental health issues are often alleged as representing softness and undependability, which is adversative to a culture that craves strength, steadfastness, and commitment to performing one's duty (Bullock & Garland, 2017).

### **Coping Tactics of Emergency Dispatchers**

Coping is the aptitude to manage stressful opinions, and feelings, and to handle hostile events from which those moods are derived (de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018). Coping skills and approaches advance over time (Upadhyaya et al., 2016; Rivera, 2015). However, personnel who understand how to manage their emotions tend to handle stressors more effectively. However, more studies about coping strategies are needed (Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Huang et al., 2015; Golding et al., 2017). Upadhyaya et al. (2016) and Rivera (2015) found that personal capability, tolerance of negative work situations, the positive reception of change, and adaptability could aid in improving an individual's aptitude to cope with stressful circumstances.

Coping skills and strategies develop over time. Therefore, workers with experience are inclined to handle stressors in a more well-organized manner, however, more studies are needed in this area (Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; Folwell & Kauer,

2018; Huang et al., 2015; Sattler et al., 2014). Coping is defined as one's aptitude to manage stressful thoughts and feelings and to deal with unfriendly proceedings from which those feelings come (Anshel et al., 2013; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018). With effective coping skills a person can enjoy better job fulfillment (Anshel et al., 2013; Carleton et al., 2018; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Kilroy et al., 2016; Sattler et al., 2014; Steenbergen et al., 2017; Vorell & Carmack, 2014).

Individual capability, broad-mindedness of negative work situations, positive acceptance of change, flexibility, for example, contribute to one's aptitude to manage in stressful circumstances (Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; Upadyaya et al., 2016; Rivera, 2015).

Carleton et al. (2018), Upadyaya et al. (2016), and Vorell and Carmack (2014) discovered that support from family, friends, coworkers, and management raises job satisfaction and decreases the negative components of exposure to those stressors.

There are both positive and negative coping skills and approaches (Anshell et al., 2013; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018). 9-1-1 dispatchers' stressors cannot be removed, but researchers suggest that dispatchers must be shown how to efficiently manage their stress (Anshell et al., 2013; de Visser et al., 2016; Regehr et al., 2013).

Approach coping is the procedure of gathering data and assessing the recognized threat; planning, monitoring, venting, and strategizing are also instances of approach coping (Anshel et al., 2013; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Sattler et al., 2014).

Avoidance coping involves physically eliminating oneself from the apparent threat (Anshel et al., 2013; Carleton et al., 2018; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018).

Exercising, walking away, determining the significance of data, and emotionally distancing oneself from the stressor are examples of avoidance coping (Anshel et al.,

2013; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018). Approach coping is the chief coping ability among law enforcement, although avoidance coping can be used also, although both are equally good (Anshel et al., 2013; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018). Positive social support, interior locus of control, and an engaging situation have been shown to have positive properties on the decrease of job dissatisfaction (Folwell & Kauer, 2018, Garcia et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2015; Regehr et al., 2013). De Visser et al. (2016) and Folwell and Kauer (2018) explained that negative, or maladaptive, coping skills include smoking, drinking, violence, engaging in risk-taking behavior, and separating oneself from others.

A two-part study was conducted by researchers who wanted to scrutinize whether a mindfulness-based intervention program would help alleviate the effects of expressive and displaced trauma (Marks et al., 2018). This team of researchers recognized and documented a thoughtful issue in the 9-1-1 industry; namely, the difference between military PTSD prevention efforts and that of emergency dispatchers. While prevention programs are already in place for military personnel, the researchers recommended a custom-made program for 9-1-1 experts (Marks et al., 2018). The researchers clarified that soldiers' trauma experience is direct, encompassing numerous senses, including olfactory, auditory, visual, and tactile whereas 9-1-1 dispatchers' exposure to trauma is completely unintended and encompasses mostly the hearing sense (Marks et al., 2018).

Marks et al.'s (2018) studies envisioned comprehending the connection between current apparent control, quality of life, and secondary traumatic stress. Their examination showed that persons with a higher level of control will likely practice a reduced amount of secondary traumatic stress. The researchers decided to reference

training that emphasizes how emergency dispatchers can mature and present perceived control when they are managing critical incidents (Marks et al., 2018). The researchers further propose mindfulness intervention plans to assist in reducing stress and cultivating emergency dispatchers' well-being (Marks et al., 2018). The researchers suggested that emergency dispatchers are unable to control past or future 9-1-1 calls (Marks et al., 2018). Marks et al. (2018) found that with mindfulness training and interference, they may be able to regulate troubling thoughts during a present emergency incident, which would eventually decrease the succeeding secondary stress reactions.

### **Peer Support for Emergency Dispatchers**

The efficiency of peer support programs, which lead to many optimistic outcomes, must also be assessed (Gill et al., 2018). Peer support programs relate to formal mentorship programs in police services that reduce anxiety levels among contributing members. In addition, officers who applied optimistic coping policies following a disturbing incident experienced positive outcome, including the aptitude to remain involved in self-initiated coping approaches such as self-empowerment, optimistic reframing, physical movement, cooking, mindfulness, writing, and seeking more positive involvements, and other results relating to other-involved managing strategies, such as peer support, formal support, and family support (Pitel et al., 2018). Pitel et al. (2018) concluded that the most effective multifaceted method of peer support combines family, administrative, and clinical provisions.

Levenson (2016) explained how in-house training for mental health and wellness in law enforcement would be a helpful requirement for supporting and grounding peers. As the peer supporter comprehends the law enforcement philosophy, they can speak the

language and possess behavior qualities that law enforcement personnel can recognize and acknowledge. The peer supporter is familiar with the job at hand and can relate to the individual who is having a challenging time coping (Levenson, 2016; Vayshenker et al., 2016). First responders are an inward-looking group who believe that many on the outside cannot relate to what they have experienced; therefore, they fear traumatizing others or being concerned about what others think of their lack of apparent strength in the ability to cope (Asad & Chreim, 2016). Dispatchers tend to hold in what they deal with daily and cannot discuss work situations with people outside of work because of they lack understanding (Vayshenker et al., 2016). Levenson (2016) and Vayshenker et al. (2016) found that persons regarded peer support as specifically valuable because of the occasion for a non-treatment-based, regularizing relationship.

A peer supporter takes on an extraordinary role and predisposition to listen to their peers as well as to identify aid and send coworkers to resources that the peer supporter agency works with (Asad & Chreim, 2016). Peer support is an inclusive and healthy approach for reaching groups that health services too regularly fail to partake in (Sokol & Fisher, 2016). Dispatchers may not even understand they have a problem that is distressing them or those around them (Vayshenker et al., 2016). The culture is, "I can handle it. I've got this" (Asad & Chreim, 2016, p.770). Vayshenker et al. (2016) suggested that peer supporters are qualified to distinguish their own emotions as well as those they work with.

The key objective of a peer support program is to resolve employee and workplace issues before they worsen to crisis levels by providing an additional support network in the workplace (Wallace, 2016). The goals of peer support do not relate

exclusively to facilitating a person's improvement from a traumatic or highly stressful incident; rather, peer support is meant to help uphold and endorse psychological and physical health, and well-being more generally (Creamer et al., 2012). Research into burnout and employee preservation among health professionals has also recognized the position of peer support. Peer support has been created to deliver health professionals with optimistic authentication, a sense of communal experience, knowledge, and opening for thoughtful practice, stress and coping strategies, and improved self-confidence (Forster & Haiz, 2015). Miyamoto and Sono (2012) argued that to redefine ideas about assistance and support, how empathetic human relationships can be constructed and conventional attitudes about providing support must be reconsidered for dispatchers and police officers. Additionally, Heffren and Hausdorf's (2016) study, which used the Distress Disclosure Index, showed that police officers and dispatchers found it easier to express themselves to other officers when they were in a caring situation. In addition, Burke et al. (2018) recommended that peer support in small groups can be an effective way of growing self-efficacy and ability among individuals with mental health issues.

### **Summary**

Job satisfaction is indispensable to dropping turnover rates that result in loss of efficiency, profit losses, reduced efficiency, and amplified costs (Balogun et al., 2020; Scanlan & Still, 2019). Existing literature also clarified that the best way to lessen employee turnover is to further study the causes for turnover (Wubetie et al., 2020). Little research exists on the position of the emergency dispatcher. While some studies examine stress and the psychological well-being of 9-1-1 police dispatchers, few explore whether trauma plays a role in a dispatcher's complete job satisfaction, burnout, and

turnover (Bedini et al., 2017; Golding et al., 2017; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). What is known is that emergency dispatchers can come across shocking experiences and develop trauma disorders (Bedini et al., 2017; Golding et al., 2017; Klimley et al., 2018; Lilly & Pierce, 2013; Pierce & Lilly, 2012). Klimley et al. (2018) recognized that PTSD symptoms in dispatchers are similar for law enforcement and firefighters. Furthermore, Klimley et al. (2018) advised that some risk factors for dispatchers can include control over the conditions, and less organizational support.

A 9-1-1 police dispatcher is the first person the public contacts for support (Baseman et al., 2018). 9-1-1 police dispatchers are placed into circumstances that require them to make critical decisions within seconds (Golding et al., 2017; Leonardsen et al., 2019). The factors discussed in this chapter related to burnout consist of culture, stress, vicarious trauma, mental health, coping tactics, and peer support. Chapter 3 will address the qualitative research method and design of the identified research questions. Further, the specific research design of phenomenology, the research design, participants, and data analysis.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study examined how long-term police dispatchers use coping mechanisms to prevent, and/or recover from burnout. A phenomenology study defines the meaning of an experience—both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced, which creates opportunities to learn from the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Exploring lived experiences of long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers is useful in understanding the coping strategies to help prevent burnout and turnover. This study intended to gather information that will permit readers to gain a better understanding of the stressful complexities, functionality, and role of 9-1-1 police dispatchers in how the persons cope to potentially prevent burnout.

This phenomenological design component of individual face-to-face interviews, telephone, or recorded video in a natural setting delivers an atmosphere of safety and openness for the participants to share their experiences (Sundler et al., 2019). The plan was to interview six to 18 long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers and supervisors who work at one agency in California and one agency in Arizona. The reason supervisors were also interviewed at these agencies was that they are trained as 9-1-1 police dispatchers and worked for several years as dispatchers before their promotion. Moreover, some 9-1-1 dispatch police supervisors, like the supervisors in the two departments, continue to actively answer calls and work the radio for their department while supervising. Microsoft Teams was used for interviews and delivered data to address the three research questions.

- RQ1: What are the perceptions of the work stressors of 9-1-1 police dispatchers?

- RQ2: How do the 9-1-1 police dispatchers describe their coping strategies to manage these stressors to prevent burnout?
- RQ3: What types of resources do 9-1-1 police dispatchers' access for their mental health/wellness? If they do not access any, or have any available, what would they like to see their department offer?

### **Research Method**

The research study relied on a qualitative research method. Researchers use qualitative methods to discover people's real-world experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), and to attain four goals: (a) exploration, (b) description, (c) comparison, and (d) testing models verifying hypotheses in contradiction to observations (Mershad & Zhang, 2016). Petrescu and Lauer (2017) found value in the qualitative methodology in discovering the phenomena of customer use of online communication. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) maintained that qualitative research can be used to discover and define real-world consumer behavior.

The researcher assessed the research method to determine the suitability of qualitative research. Another aspect of clarifying the suitability of qualitative research is the assessment of quantitative and mixed method approaches. Quantitative research is an applied research method used to inspect variables' relationships and numerical significance, but the goal of this study was not to scrutinize the statistical relationship between emergency 9-1-1 police dispatchers and their coping techniques. Therefore, quantitative research was not a consideration for this study.

Mixed method research consists of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Investigators use qualitative research to discover a person's or a group's

lived experiences and quantitative research to measure the associations between variables (Green et al., 2014). The goal of this study was to find coping mechanisms to assist new dispatchers in preventing, or managing, burnout to aid in reducing turnover. Overall, assessing the three research methods—qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods—led to the decision to rely on a qualitative method to capture the appropriate data.

### **Research Design**

Choosing the phenomenology research design aided in conducting an experience-based and text-oriented method for a study of a lifeworld. An exclusive feature of this design is the ability to induce proportions of lived meaning (Adams & van Manen, 2017). An advantage of this research design was that the researcher could conduct a study in which participants shared life experiences about cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge to mold and contribute to the understanding of a particular phenomenon (Adams & van Manen, 2017). General strategies to use when engaging the phenomenological design are one's own experiences and sensual perception of the investigated phenomenon or other people's lived experiences developed during the research process to define a phenomenon (Barnham, 2015).

For this study, the phenomenon explored was how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers develop coping mechanisms, decreasing burnout, and decreasing turnover. The phenomenology research design allowed the researcher to study the lived experiences of the participants through interviews. Researchers will ask general questions and request clarification about the circumstances that could have influenced their experiences of the phenomenon (Barnham, 2015). Creswell and Poth (2017) specified that questions in a phenomenological study or interview should focus on gathering data

that will lead to the structural and textural documentation of the phenomenon and to an understanding of the participants' shared meaning. Saunders et al. (2018) explored data saturation and advised that it is reached when there is enough information to duplicate the study, when the skill to obtain additional new information has been achieved, and when further coding is no longer feasible.

The researcher considered several qualitative designs, such as ethnography, case studies, narrative research, and grounded theory, in addition to the phenomenological method. Ethnography studies come from the shared designs of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a lengthy period. The data collection included observations and interviews. The shortcoming of using ethnography for this study was that the participants must be in the same location, thus eliminating the study participants (Punch, 2016).

The narrative research design of inquiry is when the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to deliver stories about their lives. It is repeated by the researcher in narrative chronology (Punch, 2016). This design of inquiry does not meet the principles of this research. The grounded theory design originates from a general abstract theory of procedure, action, or interaction grounded in participants opinions. The process includes using numerous stages of data collection and the modification and interrelation of groupings of data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Grounded theory design was not suitable for this study's direction.

Case studies are intended for in-depth analysis of a program, event, activity, or procedure of one or more persons. Case studies are restricted by time and activity. The researcher collects extensive data with various data collection procedures over a

continuous period (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Punch, 2016), which was not the emphasis of this research. The phenomenological method offers a complete description of issues or difficulties under investigation and captures several voices and viewpoints from the participants (Klenke, 2016). This research approach was the most suitable research strategy from the various research designs and for this study on discovering how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers prevent, and/or recover, from burnout.

### **Instruments**

According to Creswell and Poth (2017), a research instrument is a tool used to gather, measure, and investigate data revealed to the researcher. The researcher is also considered a qualitative instrument because all explanations, interpretations, and analyses are filtered through the researchers' eyes (Anderson, 2017). Interviews are an instrument used for the qualitative study (Bryman, 2016). This researcher conducted an organized interview with an official set of questions associated with the three research questions for this study. This study included phenomenological, semi-structured interviews as a primary method of data collection. Van Manen (2016) defined interviewing as having two purposes: (1) a means to discover and develop a rich understanding of the phenomenon, and (2) to advance a conversation around the meaning of experience. Gill et al. (2008) found that semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and follow. The interviews were recorded via audio and video, and field notes were taken. The researcher was also an instrument to deliver a comfortable means for dialogue based on a shared police dispatch experience with the participants. Pezalla et al. (2012) found the researcher has the potential to create space for cooperative conversation with participants during the interviewing process.

## **Interview Procedures**

The interview procedures consisted first of asking participants to consent to the study at which time they were provided with the purpose of the study. The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions (Appendix A). The participants were interviewed via the video technology Microsoft Teams. With the consent of the participants, the sessions were recorded to aid in the translation procedure and field notes were taken. To ensure the effectiveness of the participant interviews, an interview procedure was established using uniform unrestricted questions that aligned with the research questions. Open-ended questions were presented to the participants to safeguard uniformity and consistency. The interview procedure included approval from participants to conduct, record, and transcribe the interview. Next, a pilot interview was conducted to confirm the effectiveness of the interview process, content, wording, and sequencing of the interview questions. Third, the researcher followed the appropriate interview procedure. Lastly, the researcher reviewed data for accuracy and ethical issues, and provided data to the participant for review.

Each interview was a minimum of one hour and no longer than two hours. The interview questions were intended to extract the necessary data to support proper analysis. Once all in-depth interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed the recordings, coded and categorized the information, and data analysis was conducted. Follow-up interviews were arranged to address any missing information or misinterpreted data or to finish unasked, or unanswered, questions due to time restraints or other events before the conclusion of the interview.

## **Field Notes**

Along with the recorded interviews, field notes were taken to contribute to annotating key themes in the conversation (Patton, 2015). The notes assisted the researcher in precisely transcribing the interviews with the use of targeted data. Patton (2015) stated that notes serve three purposes. One, assisting the interviewer in formulating new questions as the interview moves along, clarifying something said earlier, looking over field notes before transcriptions to make sure the review is unfolding in the hoped for direction, and stimulating early understandings that may be pertinent to pursue in succeeding interviews while still in the field. Second, taking notes about what is said will enable later analysis, counting, and locating important quotations from the recording itself. Lastly, notes are a backup in the event the recording malfunctions or does not transcribe properly.

The researcher used field notes to aid with directing the flow of the interview by providing occasions for pause and reflection. The field notes were helpful in connecting the participants with the expressive and thoughtful aspects of the interviewing procedure. Each participant had an exclusive way of talking, therefore, it was essential to capture the whole essence of the interviews. Upon the conclusion of each interview, the researcher reviewed the field notes for precision, which was encompassed in the data analysis.

## **Trustworthiness**

Developing trust with 9-1-1 police dispatch participants was a crucial part of conducting the research. The reliability and validity of researching transition procedures was determined by establishing several measures. Hayashi et al. (2019) listed five validity criteria in qualitative research triangulation; (a) construction of research corpus;

(c) clear, rich, and detailed description of research performed; (d) surprise and (e) informants' feedback. Qualitative research shows validity by safeguarding data gathered through ethical measures with consideration for the participants. The following steps were taken to document trustworthiness:

1. The researcher confirmed participants felt comfortable with the procedure and with how data was expressed.
2. The researcher revised the transcribed information with the participants for precision.
3. Participants had the chance to review the records for accuracy.
4. The researcher recognized any potential biases using bracketing.

Threats to internal and external validity can compromise the study making the findings irrelevant to the study (Cope, 2015; Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). The researcher did not ask participants for personal or sensitive information in a public setting but instead collected data in a private space where the conversation could not have been observed nor overheard by others (Pelser et al., 2016). Nowell et al. (2017) found that for data to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a detailed, reliable, and exhaustive manner through recording, structuring, and revealing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the procedure is trustworthy. This researcher followed that process.

Ahern (1999) listed seven steps in preparation for thoughtful bracketing: (a) identify some of the curiosity the researcher may take for granted in undertaking research; (b) elucidate personal value systems and admit areas that are personal; (c)

define possible areas of possible role conflict; (d) recognize gatekeepers' interest and consider the amount to which they are favorably disposed toward the project; (e) identify feelings that could designate a lack of impartiality; (f) ask is anything new or astonishing in the data gathering or examination?; and (g) when blocks happen in the research procedure, reframe them. Bracketing allows the researcher to put aside past involvements and information connected to a research topic. Police culture necessitates founding relationships with deep trust and respect. Cockcroft (2017) suggested the police department is an atmosphere with its own set of norms. It was vital to establish trust by being dependable with the type of questions asked and safeguarding that all participants were treated fairly.

### **Participants**

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) determined that the United States had 98,600 dispatcher jobs in 2016. The data were collected from full-time 9-1-1 police dispatchers, or supervisors, who work 40 hours per week, and who were in the radio and/or PSAP positions. The 9-1-1 police dispatchers and supervisors had a minimum of three years of experience. However, these positions were not necessarily at the same time. Race, gender, and ethnicity were not a consideration in the study. A demographic data sheet was used to gather information regarding participants, which included the following: (a) gender, (b) age, and (c) ethnicity (see Appendix A).

These 9-1-1 police dispatchers were chosen based on the researcher's contacts within each police department. These dispatchers were accessed via a one-on-one Microsoft Teams interview, using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research for the recognition and selection of individuals that are especially

knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). This type of sampling indicates that the participants were chosen because they can help the researcher comprehend the research problem and research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Guest et al. (2006) argued that six to 12 interviews is a sweet spot for the number of qualitative interviews needed to reach saturation. Guest et al. (2006) posited that data saturation had for the most part occurred by the time they had analyzed twelve interviews. The researcher used an interpretivism approach allowing for a purposive sampling procedure where the participants selected purposefully for the study were considered the best to help the research problem and questions (Punch, 2016). The sample size was ten 9-1-1 police dispatchers for data saturation to occur at the start of the study. It is imperative to reach data saturation, which is the goal rather than the number of participants (Peoples, 2020).

The researcher interviewed a total of ten 9-1-1 police dispatchers and/or supervisors. Three 9-1-1 police dispatchers and/or supervisors from California and seven 9-1-1 police dispatchers and/or supervisors from Arizona. The 9-1-1 police dispatchers or supervisors were working adults with the minimum age of 21. Due to the researcher's extensive history with each department, and with employees, the researcher reached out directly to the managers of each department, via their work email. The researcher was permitted by each manager to send an email to the communications groups. This group included all dispatchers and supervisors within each department. Safeguards were implemented to ensure that participants' information was kept confidential, informed consent protocol was adhered to, advisement participation in the study was voluntary, and

freedom to withdraw from the study was acknowledged. The interview transcripts were reviewed for completeness, transcribed, and prepared for data analysis (Patton, 2015).

To assist the researcher in obtaining enough participants, the researcher used the snowball sampling method as a backup plan if there were not enough participants. The sampling process allows for the snowball sampling method if the sampling size did not meet the researcher's projected sample. The snowball technique includes asking the first participant to endorse another person and requesting the same of the second person. Through this procedure, participants are progressively selected to the point of data saturation. The technique aids the researcher in choosing participants when a limited number of participants are wanted for the research or there are not enough participants.

Snowball sampling is well suited for qualitative studies, when large sample sizes may obstruct the aptitude to gain an in-depth understanding of each of the participants' involvements (Peoples, 2020). The snowball sampling technique allows researchers to approach possible participants with an endorsement from a mutual acquaintance. The effectiveness of the methods trusts the solicitation of the qualified participant contact who trusts the researcher. The researcher made a backup plan that if a difficulty arose in communicating with or finding participants to represent the population.

According to Peoples (2020), the snowballing technique does allow for possible bias, which may surface if the mentioned participant shares the same viewpoint as the person who originally suggested it. However, this risk is offset by the advantage of reaching associates unavailable to the researcher, which is imperative to keep the participants balanced. The snowballing technique was not used, as enough participants participated in the research study.

Once the interview began, the researcher started with a personal statement regarding the interview, what to expect, and if the participant had any questions before we started. Included in this statement was a reminder that the interview would be digitally audio recorded, and the researcher requested their consent to continue. Once all participants understood, advised they had no questions or concerns, and were clear on the purpose of the study the interview began. The semi-structured interview included approximately 18 questions to ensure ample information to complete this study (see Appendix A). The interview was recorded via Microsoft Teams, including all interactions with all the participants. There were four follow-up interviews: follow-up interviews were conducted over the phone, or in person, and field notes were taken so participants could be asked additional or clarifying questions.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

The researcher examined raw qualitative data from video recordings, which allowed the researcher to safeguard the background and accuracy of the information available (Cope, 2015; Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). The researcher transcribed the discussions via Microsoft Teams recordings. The researcher used field notes in addition to the transcription to confirm the proper capture of emotions and movements. Field notes have the potential to provide an area to record non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, emotions, and the researcher's experience in gathering the data (Pelser et al., 2016). The researcher allocated a unique code to each participant to certify the protection of their privacy and to preserve confidentiality. The code entailed a number and a letter, for example, Dispatcher 1. In this example, the number signifies the participant who was involved.

The researcher exported the interviews from Microsoft Teams to the program Otter.ai for transcription. After transcription, the information was exported so that the researcher could formulate and scrutinize the data and identify themes related to the research questions. The researcher examined, analyzed, categorized, and coded data during the data collection procedure to look at classifying themes, trends, and patterns amid the participants' replies (Arcelay-Rojas, 2018; Cope, 2015; Habibi et al., 2018; Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). This permitted the researcher to begin examining the data from each interview. The researcher read all the replies and looked for the most recurrent answers, words, or trends among the participants. The researcher observed the information to recognize common themes, words, descriptions, and the like, which was useful for organizing axial coding (Pelser et al., 2016). The researcher looked at topic discussion frequency, the impression of the stressor on the participant (e.g., how they label the harshness of the stressor), and finally, exclusive characteristics or irregularities. Pelser et al. (2016) explained that a personal log or journal will aid in recording the researcher's ideas, explanations, or connections to present theories.

### **Limitations**

All qualitative research has potential limitations, notably study findings are not generalizable (Punch, 2016). Some of this study's limitations included the number of participants, using only 9-1-1 police dispatchers, and the location restriction. The study's interpretivism approach allowed a purposive sampling procedure that permitted the researcher to intentionally choose the best participants to help with the research problems and questions (Punch, 2016). Personal interviews while having their own set of limitations are essential to discover and define the participants' perspectives on the topic

and the social realism of the issues at hand (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The boundaries of this qualitative study were researcher bias and the time restraints of individual interviews. One bias that already existed is that the researcher has been a 9-1-1 police dispatcher with over 11 years of experience, five of which were supervisory experience. The researcher also analyzed all information available even if my hypotheses could be disproven during analysis. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that when biases are out in the open, they are more manageable, and the reader can assess how those elements affected the study.

One way used to reduce the impact of limitations on the research results was to create trustworthiness with participants by building a relationship that produced open and honest answers. Bracketing was used to mitigate any prejudices from the researcher's current 9-1-1 police dispatcher experience. Patton (2015) stated bracketing involves the following steps:

1. Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phases and declarations that speak straight to the phenomenon in question
2. Interpret the meaning of these expressions as a knowledgeable reader
3. Obtain the subject's understandings of these phrases, if possible
4. Review the meanings for what they reveal about the important, recurrent features of the phenomenon being studied; and
5. Offer a cautious statement, or description, of the phenomenon in terms of the important recurrent features recognized in step 4.

### **Delimitations**

One delimitation of this study was concentrating on one specific area of the communications industry (police dispatch). Also, the study concentrated on two agencies in the Southwest United States of similar size and population and only dispatch for police agencies. This study was designed to target a specific population to include only long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers. While this may have limited the impact of this research since the nature of this topic is delicate, achieving valuable and honest feedback would be problematic with no connection between the researcher and the study's participants. The researcher worked with the police dispatchers, almost eight years at the first department and over three years with the second. This has created a connection between the researcher and participants. Therefore, the findings and outcomes may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, positions, or future periods.

### **Summary**

Qualitative research is an effective way to discover the human side of an organizational matter (Creswell & Poth 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This chapter deliberated the methods used to recognize the factors contributing to 9-1-1 police dispatch burnout and how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers use coping strategies to help mitigate it. A qualitative research method was chosen to structure the study. The research design was phenomenology. The phenomenology design allowed the participants to tell a story about individual experiences that the researcher interpreted and delivered an expressive narrative of the participants' stories. (Neubauer et al., 2019). The participants included ten long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers with a minimum of three years of experience. The data collection method was individual interviews online using Microsoft

Teams. The data analysis consisted of recorded interviews transcribed immediately after the interview, helping to develop themes. Individual interviews are important with a good mediator as the dispatchers are detached from their workspace and can more openly voice their feelings hence diverse viewpoints increase complexity (Mandal, 2018). Limitations of the study included the ability to select participants. One delimitation was choosing only the dispatch industry for police departments. Chapter 4 included a presentation of the findings. Chapter 5 includes the findings, applications, and findings to the problem statement, applications to leadership, recommendations for change, further research, and conclusion.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to discover how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers prevent and/or recover from burnout. In this study, the researcher explored how 9-1-1 police dispatcher described their stressors and how they managed these stressors to prevent and/or recover from burnout. A qualitative research method from a phenomenology research design was used to conduct this study. The study was specific to full-time, long-term, 9-1-1 police dispatchers, or supervisors, who work 40 hours per week, and who are in the radio and/or PSAP positions. The 9-1-1 police dispatchers and supervisors required a minimum of three years of experience. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants. The data collection process consisted of individual video interviews. Three research questions were used in this study were:

- RQ1: What are the perceptions of the work stressors of a 9-1-1 police dispatcher?
- RQ2: How does a 9-1-1 police dispatcher describe their coping strategies to manage these stressors to prevent burnout?
- RQ3: What types of resources do 9-1-1 police dispatchers' access for their mental health/wellness? If they do not access any, or have any available, what would they like to see their department offer?

In Chapter 4, the researcher will describe the major findings of this study. The researcher will review the data analysis, themes, conceptual categories, and validity and accuracy. The summary of the findings will conclude the section.

## **Presentation of Findings**

The presentation of this study's finding begins with the participants' responses, transcribed from individual interviews of 18 questions related to the three research questions. Participants responded to a voluntary email invitation to take part in the research project. Participants received the email from each agency's dispatch communications general email. Three dispatchers and/or supervisors were from California and seven dispatchers and/or supervisors were from Arizona. Each participant responded to the invitation and agreed to participate voluntarily and signed the informed consent form sent with the invitation. Interview scheduling took place via email with a calendar invite. The interviews were video and audio recorded through the Microsoft Teams software.

### **Participants**

All ten participants who volunteered were female. Both male and female dispatchers were invited to participate, but no male dispatchers volunteered to be interviewed. The participants were between the ages of 31 and 54. The experience in dispatch time ranged from 4.5 to 16.5 years, for a total of 85.5 years of law enforcement dispatching experience. Two participants from California were 9-1-1 police dispatchers, one participant from California was a 9-1-1 police dispatch supervisor, three participants were 9-1-1 police dispatch supervisors from Arizona, and four were 9-1-1 police dispatchers from Arizona. Table 1 depicts a detailed description of the participants. The use of pseudonyms aided in protecting the participants' identities: all data were stored with password protection, and the video/audio files will remain stored securely on a computer hard drive for a minimum of five years.

**Table 1***Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Agency	Job Description	Years of Experience
Dispatcher 1	54	Female	Gilbert	Dispatcher	7.5
Dispatcher 2	37	Female	Gilbert	Dispatch Supervisor	5
Dispatcher 3	31	Female	Irvine	Dispatcher	5
Dispatcher 4	37	Female	Gilbert	Dispatcher	15
Dispatcher 5	41	Female	Gilbert	Dispatcher	4.5
Dispatcher 6	39	Female	Irvine	Dispatch Supervisor	13
Dispatcher 7	50	Female	Gilbert	Dispatch Supervisor	5
Dispatcher 8	34	Female	Irvine	Dispatcher	7
Dispatcher 9	38	Female	Gilbert	Dispatcher	7
Dispatcher 10	48	Female	Gilbert	Dispatcher	16

**Data Analysis**

The investigator clarified the procedures and the purpose of the study to the participants at the beginning of each interview to confirm participant awareness. Eighteen semi-structured questions were read to each participant to increase the research questions

to gain an in-depth understanding of the dispatch and/or dispatch supervisors' experience. Additionally, the participants were informed that the researcher might need clarity for any question or the response may produce a new question. The researcher did have follow-up interviews with a few participants.

The researcher transcribed the discussions via audio/video recordings with a program called Otter.ai. Otter.ai turns voice conversations into smart notes that can easily be searched. The researcher used field notes in addition to the transcription to confirm the proper capturing of emotions and movements. The researcher scrutinized, analyzed, categorized, and coded data during the data collection process and looked at classifying themes, trends, and patterns amid the participant's replies. The themes and concepts are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Presentation of Findings*

Themes	Conceptual Categories
Stress	Lack of Support Traumatic Events Environment
Work-Life Balance	Shiftwork Staffing Health
Coping Mechanism	Coping at Work Coping Outside of Work Department Resources

## **Validity and Accuracy**

The researcher used dispatch knowledge to explain the experiences and terminology used by the participants. Furthermore, researcher's experience assisted in creating rapport and creating a comfortable environment for the exchange of data with participants. Emails were sent to each participant with a copy of their transcript interview to screen and verify the accuracy of the data to make corrections to their replies if required. The participants verified the transcripts and agreed on the accuracy of the data. Bracketing was another technique used and allowed the researcher to put aside past involvements and information connected to a research topic. Tufford and Newman (2010) explored bracketing and found that while bracketing can alleviate adverse effects of the research endeavor, it also enables the researcher to reach profounder levels of reflection across all phases of qualitative research: selecting a topic and population, designing the interview, collecting, and interpreting data, and reporting findings.

### **Theme 1: Stress**

Several variables were consistent with all participants regarding stress that relates to 9-1-1 police dispatching career. Stress caused by the career could affect a range of emotions not only in the workplace but also a 9-1-1 police dispatcher outside of work in their personal life. The following findings were generated from the participants when discussing stress: (a) Lack of Support, (b) Traumatic Events, and (c) Environment.

#### **Lack of Support**

The feeling of lacking support was a common theme. Participants felt this way for a variety of reasons, such as inconsistency/transparency, feelings of being overwhelmed, uncertainty, and poor management/leadership. nine of 10 participants believed that a lack

of support existed during their shifts. Dispatcher 1 shared experiences about what she believed was an inconsistency and lack of management in the department:

Inconsistency. I do feel that there have been some changes within my department that I don't necessarily, on a personal level, feel are for the best. There has been some inconsistency. And that just puts pressure on the group as a whole... Yeah. And the other side of that is inconsistency also means that you have intended or not there is the appearance of favoritism. And all that does is trash your morale. And that is a room because of the personalities and the stress. The level that we are under .... I think are we also see, honestly, we see different shifts, getting away with different things. So, there's not a lot of consistency in how things are done. And maybe part of it is because literally night and day. You're also dealing with different groups at night. Inconsistency between all the shifts between, maybe some of [them], the necessarily the rules, but the way that they are enforced.

Dispatcher 3 shared that if there was a way to give employees their breaks it would be helpful:

But like, I don't know, I just feel like maybe more of a structured program to get people their breaks. And like, even if it means the bureau supervisor coming in to cover the room or getting somebody to cover the room while we take breaks. So that, like, we can decompress, and, you know, take a breather, but then we don't have to stress about leaving the room one person down. Because that's our biggest thing, that's why we don't take it in. So having somebody that can, like, come in for a couple of hours to cover while everybody rotates their break, I feel like would be a huge, huge thing.

In a follow-up interview with Dispatcher 3, she explained why it would be a huge thing to get breaks:

It would be a huge, huge thing to get breaks so that each person could step out of the room just to get away. This job is nonstop ... sometimes you need to step out of the chaos to walk and catch your breath, you know? Being short staffed and constantly working is overwhelming and exhausting. Just stepping away can give an employee that mental break.

Dispatcher 6 spoke on the growth of the city but how staffing never grows in dispatch:

But yeah, like we do so much like the city is growing. Our calls are growing. We have, like we just hired 40 more officers, but like our staffing stays the same. And because we have [a] new system, the officers don't want to learn it, so they rely on us to do everything.

Dispatcher 8 shared her thoughts on why her department's leadership was poor:

Yeah. Yeah, there's poor leadership, poor leadership, and archaic ways. Archaic policies are archaic ways that are not being, that are not progressing with the times. They're not progressing with technology; they're not progressing with. Yeah. And advancements in technology and society and the generational changes, the supervisors, and the supervisory staff can't deal don't know how to deal with generational changes in generational and they can't they aren't open-minded to the generational changes that are happening in front of them. So instead of one dispatcher like me, they're dealing with, now they're dealing with nine of them, which is hilarious.

Dispatcher 9 also spoke on how she felt that management did not listen to

employees' ideas:

Management? Yeah. Sometimes I feel like I'm, there's not a lot of, there's not a lot of listening, from, like, from the frontline workers. I feel like there's not a lot of transparency that comes from the manager's office. Um, and I feel like there's a lot of talking in circles. I was trying to think of the words. And so, it gets a little frustrating. I know personally like I've had ideas, and then I just stopped sharing my ideas, because I just felt like they were getting nowhere. So, it was just like being shut down for no reason. Or like, the reason was just like not valid, I guess, in my opinion. So. Yeah. Or it didn't really make sense. So, it was just like, okay, I'll just come in and I'll just do my job and kind of be checked out which I was checked out for a while.

9-1-1 police dispatch supervisors who must supervise and work a position in the room (e.g., phones, radio), can feel overwhelmed. A few dispatch supervisors' extra duties were interrupted because they had to answer the phones or work a radio position. Supervisors may also have to train because there are not enough trainers, or they are giving their staff a break. Dispatcher 6 spoke about being overwhelmed:

I am a working supervisor in the room and while training on phones and trying to supervise the room like, I can't do, and I keep complaining about it. Because I'm

like, I can't hear the radio [to know what is going on]. And so, when a sergeant asked me what happened or why this call went this way, I don't know because I'm in phone land [training] for 12 hours every day instead of supervising since we don't have enough trainers and staffing. Well, like I want to increase our minimums, but management will not do it until we're fully staffed. So, it doesn't make sense .... But I think the hardest part is, I'm also the scheduling supervisor. So, I'm done with everyone's schedules, time off, assigning mandatory hours, then, like I'm helping with a trainer, do their schedule, because that's not being done. So, I, I do to myself, like, I am a perfectionist, and I add all these extra responsibilities because like, I want us to thrive and be updated. But like, I'm drowning, because when I'm on, yeah, when I'm on phones, like we're getting our asses handed to us, the radio is busy, like all the time, because again, there's 40 more officers, and they're still just the same three or four dispatchers.

Dispatcher 7 spoke about balancing supervisor duties:

The daily stress of the job. Sometimes, it's just the overwhelming amount of like stuff that's coming in traffic from the officers getting calls dispatched, the phone calls that are coming in making sure that we have enough staffing for it. Balancing the needs that the employees have, or the dispatchers have been making sure that your operation is, you know, supported.

Dispatcher 10 shared that she felt like she was constantly being pulled in multiple directions:

In a daily stress ... I feel like I'm getting pulled 10 different ways all at once. And I feel like it's constant, that I feel overwhelmed that I'll get a question from one employee. And then someone else would be like, oh, I have a question. Someone else is like, I have a question. And then the line will ring. And then I'm answering a question for a resident that is calling it. I just feel like, constantly, it's draining by the end of my shift.

Working as a 9-1-1 police dispatcher nothing is routine. They never know what type of calls they will get throughout the day. Sometimes 9-1-1 police dispatchers do not find out what happens after the officer arrives. They never have any downtime between calls, and it can leave dispatchers feeling uncertain. Dispatcher 2 spoke about the uncertainty of the job:

I feel like I, I honestly do feel like it's the unknown. So, they, we go in, and we have no idea there is nothing routine about our job, right? There's nothing routine

about our job. The function job function, yes, it's all routine. But the stuff that's going to happen for the day, we never know. So, I feel like a daily stressor is just not knowing what the day has, you know, in store for you, because when I'm there, yeah, you never know what's right everyone. Being a new supervisor, it's hard to keep up and my training was good, but sometimes the other supervisors were training new dispatchers to help relieve our trainers and give them a break. There is so much I am still learning.

And Dispatcher 4 discussed not having closure on incidents:

I think as a whole, it's a lot of it is we don't have closure on incidents, like we get the beginning and sense of what's happening, and we have all the initial information, but we never know what happens. And then we could be dealing with a child drowning, and then the very next call could be a shooting or something even as simple as they get my food and drive-thru, you know. So, it's stuff like that where we can have all these multitudes, the trauma within a call back-to-back-to-back to that.

Overall, participants offered various reasons why they feel stress throughout their careers: the lack of management and structure; management transparency; the uncertainty of the job; and no closure. Further, supervisors felt a lack of support and overwhelmed at times.

### **Traumatic Events**

9-1-1 police dispatchers have exposure to potentially traumatic incidents every day. Although they are not physically present at the time of the incident, it is likely that this constant exposure in concert with highly stressful work conditions could lead to potentially negative emotional and physical outcomes. Nine of 10 dispatchers had something to say about a traumatic event they handled or concerns about handling certain types of calls, or concerns over an officer getting injured. Dispatcher 1 explains how difficult it is to forget certain calls:

I mean, there are calls from two years ago that I still think about that I wonder how they're doing now. And one of them, in particular, I still get occasional updates from the detective that they worked with, on how the person is doing.

Which, actually, you know, I don't know for me personally, that makes me feel better because it's like, alright, well, they're still alive and kicking. So as long as you're alive and kicking, there's still a chance some calls you get off the phone and that call is gone. But there are some calls and there are still some where I wake up and go oh my God, should I have said this instead? Because I'll go to sleep thinking about it. And then I wake up thinking about it. But it's not every day. It's not every call. There are those triggers.

Dispatcher 2 talks about how hard it is after a traumatic event:

The cause of the job itself is that everything about the job is stressful. It's fucking hard. Dealing with the aftermath, and whatnot, of traumatic events. Not really having time to process what you just heard and dealt with when the next call comes in. But can I pinpoint one specific stressor? No, I don't think there's so much because then that's going to bring me back to like the whole work-life balance like, yeah, it's like a circle. Yeah. Like we're the amount of time that we spend there and the physical and mental toll it takes on you. And then having to deal with your everyday normal life. Stuff just seems piled [up].

Dispatcher 3 speaks on how hard it is to hear people's bad days:

I mean, you know, dispatchers hear at all we hear, like we don't hear anybody's good days, we hear everybody's bad days. So ... nine out of 10 calls that we'll get is not just like, hey, how are you? I saw something weird. Every call is like screaming or yelling or oh my god hurry up and get here and you know, after 100 and something to those the first hour of your shift you're like, okay, like and you know, multiply that by seven, eight days a week, for 20 years. You're burnt out, you know, by the end of your workday, you don't want to talk to anybody. I don't feel bad because I don't call my mom like I should because I don't want to talk to anybody at the end of my shift. I am talked out. It's just constant stimulation and constant stress. You know, and that makes it sound like I don't enjoy it because I do, I love it. But it is it's a constant, you're in a constant state of stress your entire 12 hours.

Dispatcher 4 spoke about the unknown of each call:

Um, well, I think it is because you don't know what that next phone call is going to be or that next transmission is going to be. So, you're always kind of in the state of fight or flight like, what's gonna happen next? What is my next thing to do? When you're on the radio, your ears, I mean, even on the phone, but your ears are kind of your lifeline. So, what happens if I don't hear every word? Or if I heard everything, they said perfectly what I've gotten them help faster, would it have mattered? Does that change outcome, you know, and for me, I have to just realize, like, I do the best of my ability every day. And I just try very hard to make sure that I'm constantly alert and involved in what's happening and make

sure I know where my officers are. But that kind of stress does lead to like an anxiety almost of constantly double checking your work constantly. Relistening to make sure you heard everything constantly. Okay, they said here, but are they really mapping there? This is, you know, so that kind of stress builds up to an anxiety. And then on the phones, it's kind of the same thing, like, am I typing fast enough? Am I getting the information quickly enough for the officers that are responding in my telling the citizen helps coming in my pleasant enough to them, but at the same time, making sure I'm getting the information I need on in a timely manner? To get them the help they need. So, yes.

Dispatcher 5 spoke about her triggers about traumatic incidents, "Um, bad phone calls that involve kids because I have children. These calls are harder to get over or move on. Especially the drowning calls or where children are killed."

Dispatcher 6 spoke about dealing with language barriers and delays:

I think the language barrier I mean, thankfully like technology is advancing all the time. And so, when people call 911 like from their cell phones, or you know even the landline but as long as they're calling nine one, we have an address that we can go to. But in or like in [City], we have a diverse community and a lot of them don't speak English. So, to decipher like, what actually is going on, it is super stressful sometimes because you might think that you have this huge emergency and it was an Amazon driver that knocked on her door, or like, you just have no zero clue. And, you know, then like, I think what stresses me out is like, knowing that like I could potentially be putting my officers in danger, because like, we don't know what's happening. We don't know why they're like, what's happening? Like, they're risking their lives now rolling code three [lights and sirens], to the city to potentially like nothing. Or they could go there and there it's a house full of gang members that won't answer the door.

Dispatcher 7 spoke about the possible long-term effects of the exposure to critical events:

Um, well, I mean, career-wise, the stressors, I would say probably just the long-term effects of the exposure. I'm not I mean, not feeling like, personally, it would be like not feeling like I'm doing a good enough job is a stressor for me. Making sure that I'm doing everything that I need to do. I probably put more stress on myself than necessary. Example I'm probably the one that had the biggest impact on me was the San Tan Ford the triple nine [officer down] that we had. That probably had the longest, well, the largest impact on not only I mean, obviously, personally but professionally, and the impact that it made in my decisions moving forward in my career. I had PTSS [post-traumatic stress symptoms] for a long

period afterward and sometimes various things officers get into now can trigger this.

Dispatcher 9 spoke about having a support system when dealing with traumatic incidents:

It can get really hard to, like, hear that. That anguish, and that anxiety and that fear, and all that trauma. And if you don't have like a support system, or if you don't know how to deal with it like that can really weigh on you as a person. And you can really start to look at things a lot more negatively if you allow it. The whole like, I mean, I joke around about being like, oh my God, I hate people, or it's two people out there, whatever. But like, there's some people where it's like, I really feel like, they really feel that way. Because we really do deal with like, the worst people, right, or the worst in people. And so that after, I mean, after you do it for so long, it can probably start to change who you are as a person, if you let it. And if you don't do the things that you need to do to, to kind of stay grounded and to stay who you are, I guess as a person really or like to do the growth, the personal growth, or I think the biggest part, though, is just having that support system so that you can get through those stressors. But I think, you know, trauma. What is it called when it's like the secondhand trauma?

Dispatcher 10 spoke about an officer in the line of duty death:

Worst night of my career was when Lieutenant [Name] was shot. Yeah, that's right out about that, that that night was hard. And I know you want to talk about appetite change. My appetite changed and I couldn't sleep because every time I would close my eyes and try to sleep, I could hear the radio transmissions. And this happened for months. Um, my biggest I think the only thing I was really upset about was I wasn't told that Lieutenant [Name] passed away. I don't know if it was in denial. But they had put him in the ambulance, and they took him away. So, in my mind, I thought he had a chance. The chance Yeah. My sister worked at [City] dispatch at the time, and she texted me. And she's like, I'm so sorry. Your Lieutenant passed away. What? What? And apparently, like everybody knew but us in dispatch. I'll never forget that night.

Altogether, traumatic events affect dispatchers in various ways. Traumatic events can lead to several issues for 9-1-1 police dispatchers, including burnout and post-traumatic stress syndrome. These events can stick with a dispatcher forever and can cause different types of stress symptoms in each person.

## Environment

The environment in a 9-1-1 police dispatch center can affect the mood in the room. Six of 10 dispatchers felt other employees played a role in impacting the environment. These dispatchers felt that other employees did not do their job efficiently or they created a toxic work environment. Other dispatchers felt there was a divide between dispatchers and patrol officers. Dispatcher 2 talked about leaving her last department due to the environment:

I left my previous agency after a year of being there. It was a combination of, and it wasn't even that I had enough time to feel like that burnout, right, it was more so it was just a horrible situation. It was a very toxic environment. Where I feel like we already work in a very stressful environment, there's no reason why our own coworkers need to make it 10 times worse for us. So, I'm a firm believer and always trying to make or trying to contribute to a positive environment because our job already is very, extremely hard. And there's not a lot of support for us dispatchers out there. So of course, that burnout, all that toxic and negativity can 1,000% contribute to that burnout a lot faster. But in that place, it made me feel like it just wasn't somewhere I needed to be. Or somewhere I didn't belong. I loved the job itself. But the environment was just not something that I felt like I belonged there. And that was very, very stressful. On top of being stressed out over the job, I left. Shortly after my training, I decided to put my mental health first. Which I'm very, very proud of myself for doing because I probably would have stuck through it. But I just it was just horrible, horrible. And I went to work for something completely not related to any law enforcement thing, even though this was my dream job, right? So, I went to go work for a TV station where I had the most amazing time and I think it's just because I went from a super, super, super stressful job to something so chill. So, like, lively, so like fun. And it was just a different environment. But I always felt like I'm missing because that's what I really wanted to do.

Dispatcher 1 talked about the various personalities that work together:

In our center. There are a lot, and we are all type A. So that doesn't help either because you get and there are definitely cliques. There are cliques within our center, on different shifts with different people. And it makes it difficult if you are new coming on. And for the most part, most part, I think a lot of the personalities tend to group together on shifts during shift. You do see a lot of the same types of personalities grouped together. But on occasion, you get some overflow because of the way the shifted plays out. And then you're learning how to work with each

other. So, you get human personalities. Part of the problem too, when you've got people screaming in your ear 10 hours a day, potentially. Not every day, but potentially 10 hours a day. And you're learning to deal with new people. That's a stressor.

Dispatcher 7 spoke about how the environment depends on who dispatchers work with:

Stressors, sometimes I would say environment depending on who you work with. I think that the shift that I've been on, doesn't have that situation. So that's been really nice. But I have been on those shifts where the work environment can really affect how you feel that you are doing your job like, Am I doing good enough? Am I being judged on it? I'm very fortunate that home life isn't a stressor. I've always felt that we've been a good agency in helping our dispatchers when things kind of get hard for us. Um, so my focus really has been more on the environment. Changing it?

The relationship between dispatchers and officers is vital to public and officer safety. It is imperative that cultural barriers avert effective collaboration between two of the most serious components of policing. There can be a divide between the two groups which can add negativity to the environment. Dispatcher 6 spoke about the divide between dispatchers and patrol:

Honestly, between patrol and the dispatchers, because they're always, like, feel like they're always fighting each other. And then it just makes the room so much harder, like, trying to make sure that I don't say something that's gonna hurt someone's feelings or making sure that, you know, I say the same thing to every person because we have people that turn your words against you, or makeup lies.

Dispatcher 9 spoke about how there is not communication between patrol and dispatchers:

Like, I feel like, there's such a divide between patrol and dispatch. And yeah, and that's kind of how I feel like why there isn't communication between us and patrol. And like, I'm not gonna lie, like sometimes I will just pick up the phone and call and I'll just be like, Hey, why? Why is it like this? That isn't how the culture should be like.

Dispatcher 5 spoke on other employees that she felt were slacking, “People not doing their jobs that they’re supposed to like answering phone calls.” In a follow-up interview with Dispatcher 5, she explained her statement further:

Sometimes employees will not answer overflow calls or like place an admin call on hold for a 9-1-1. Our info channel is also supposed to help with overflow calls, but depending on the person this may not happen and it’s frustrating. Why don’t you want to help? I just don’t think some people have a good work ethic.

Overall, the environment can make a difference in someone’s working day. Some 9-1-1 police dispatchers may leave to work in another department if the environment is too negative. Various personalities can sometimes cause issues between employees. Lastly, there can be a divide between patrol officers and dispatchers, which may make the environment harder to work in. These types of environments can be an added stress for 9-1-1 police dispatchers.

## **Theme 2: Work-Life Balance**

Several variables were consistent among participants regarding work-life balance that related to 9-1-1 police dispatching careers. The dispatchers’ desire for a healthy work-life balance is not only important for health and relationships but also their overall health. The following findings were generated from the participants when discussing work-life balance which included: (a) Shiftwork, (b) Staffing, and (c) Health.

### **Shiftwork**

Shiftwork created strain among the participants. Many advised it was hard, not only on your body but on your family life. Working overnight affected quite a few dispatchers. Eight out of 10 dispatchers spoke about how shiftwork affected them. Dispatcher 2 talked about how the hours she worked affected her family:

There's a ton of stressors, I mean, the schedule is one of them, it's really, really hard to have a family and work the hours that we work. And it's not so much the hours, it's also the amount of adrenaline and stress the job has. Period. Even if nothing's going on, I feel like you're always on high alert, like ready for something to happen, right? Even though you could never be ready. But it's that and then learning how to disconnect from it when you're not there. And then learning how to live your days not at work without that adrenaline that you're so used to. So, it's that work-life balance. The shift itself, the actual calls and being able to think on your feet to problem solve.

Dispatcher 4 shared the wear and tear of the night shift on her family:

Um, I think what I noticed with the stressors more, as I've been in it longer, is kind of the wear and tear does take on your family working like shift work, especially as your kids get older, and they want you at their events, or they want you to, you know, be there to wake them up in the morning and be there when they're home from school. And like that kind of like normal eight to five job where you would tend to, you know, always have that every day or be able to maybe take off time and seven, that's a little harder, where it's a little bit more juggling, where you have to try to be more creative with your schedule, and make those friends on other shifts that you can exchange shifts with or like, I'll do this for you, you do that for me. So, then you can be there and show up for them.

Dispatcher 3 spoke about night shift and how it can affect childcare:

The shift work is hard. You know, you get used to it after a while, but it's hard to keep your body up overnight. Like your body is not meant to be on graveyard. So, that parts hard. It's hard to coordinate childcare when you work these weird shifts because there's no daycare that are open or you have to rely on family members to take your kid at night. That's why my husband and I work complete opposite shifts so that somebody's always home with her or we try and like that, that itself is hard. And then like the mental load of the calls that we get and like constantly dealing with all the emotion and stress, you know, we carry a lot of the stress that these people call in with and you know, you carry that burden with them, and you feel that when they call in, I feel their stress, I feel their pain. I feel their emotions. And so like, both it's like the childcare staffing is on one shoulder, and then like, the stress of the call is on the other shoulder and you're like, oh, my gosh, this is heavy. So, it's like a combination of all of it. I feel like they all just kind of stack up on each other.

Dispatcher 6 spoke about switching shifts:

Um, I think like, I'm used to a long hours, but like, does suck having to like flip flop back and forth. Like, as I'm getting older, like, it's not as easy to do. I mean, for the most part, like my family's used to my schedule, but still like sometimes. I

don't always get my days off. So, like, I'm still I still miss some things. I see this like, long term. Hopefully my health is okay.

Dispatcher 10 shared how working the night shift is just surviving for her:

I feel like if you don't get a good night's sleep, you're just surviving. I felt when I was on night shift. Like I was a hamster. Like I was just going, but I really wasn't anything are getting done or accomplished. I was. I was awake. I'm here physically. Here I am. Yeah. I showed up today and that's not productive. I feel like shift. Just take so much of your life that. I feel like it affects everything else. It affects my family life. It affects my like being able to either attend church or church events, or even spend time with family. Like I'm so exhausted sometimes that I'm like, no, I don't want to go out because I just had a long shift, or I just had a long week.

Dispatcher 9 spoke about how the shift bid process is stressful:

I think shift bid is always stressful. I try not to stress about it. Because it's like, what? There's I don't have any control over it. Like, I mean, I have, you know, I have some control to some degree, but I don't because there's still seven people, I think ahead of me that pick shifts. So, I try not to stress about it. But like because there's so much anxiety in the room over it. Like you just feed on that. Right. So. And then I think I get more stressed about vacation bid. And like first come first serve. Because we only get a certain, like 40 hours that we're guaranteed right? Like 40 hours where and even then, I'm competing with in this case, I think it's waiting on okay, so I'm seven in addition to me.

Dispatcher 8 spoke about shiftwork based on seniority:

There's not much career growth due to the fact that is a seniority based [for example] like employment history so just you know career growth due to seniority base hiring and seniority-based rules. The variables that can't be controlled fluctuate dramatically there's only a few controlled variables and even that and they'll still affect you. So uncontrollable variables for me would in general would be the leadership, the staffing, and the room scheduling, training, and drafts.

In a follow-up interview dispatcher 8 spoke further about seniority:

Everything including shift bid is seniority based. You can basically be stuck on the same shift bid after bid. This can also happen when being drafted [mandated on days off or holding over] it was at one point based on seniority. So, you can work weekends for a long period of time if there's no growth in the department. It feels the same way when there's a supervisor promotion, usually the most senior person that applies to promote gets the job.

Dispatcher 5 shared, “When it’s hard to try to find childcare coming in early or staying later and being sleep deprived. I worry about my kids, what they’re doing, who they’re with, where they’re going. I don’t trust people now.”

Altogether, shiftwork can be hard on a dispatcher’s family, childcare, switching shifts from days to nights can be stressful during a shift bid or vacation bid. The various shifts can add stress to a dispatcher’s home life. The continual concern of what shift you will have to work, or how it affects one’s health can be stressful on dispatchers.

### **Staffing**

Staffing affected six of 10 participants. Many related that it was hard when they were short staffed which not only affected them at work, but their personal life because they can be mandated to come in on their day off or told to come in early or stay late.

When they work many days consecutively, a dispatcher will have more exposure to more and excess trauma. Dispatcher 2 spoke on this topic:

The daily stress right now, one is, is being so short staffed, so we’re working a lot. Yesterday was my eighth day in a row. Yeah, my eighth day in a row. And I got drafted for it. So, I already didn’t want to be there. You know, I was like, had to scramble for childcare, so stressed about that. And then you know, you get to work. And it’s so busy, the phones are just back-to-back too back-to-back, you know, and they’re not easy calls. They’re all heavy in progress, emotionally draining calls. And so, those are just nonstop your whole shift. And even when you switch positions, and get off phones and go to the radio, the officers are just nonstop pulling cars over and onto the next call, and on to the next call. And it just, you get like an hour of slow each shift of like, you can sit and just hear silence for a minute. And nobody does anything and just chills for a minute. But the first 11 hours of the shift are just go go go go go go.

Dispatcher 3 shared about being short staffed:

It’s like it when we’re so short staffed, and we’re working so much that it’s like, you barely have time to recover. You, you have a horrible day of five or six, very intense calls back-to-back-to-back. And then you come in the next day and you’re

just like, oh looky, another 10 back-to-back to back. Like you get no reprieve. And I feel like that's the biggest stressor is not being able to like have that time away from it to decompress.

Dispatcher 6 spoke about being short staffed to the point that emotionally

exhausts her:

Staffing, definitely, because we're so short staffed, that we're all stretched so thin, and then I think that then creates more problems. Because now my staff is upset because they're tired. They are over getting drafted. So, then they pick fights with everything. So, to be honest, like, the last couple of months, I told you, I told my boss that I didn't want to work anymore. I didn't want to be a supervisor. I wasn't going to be a trainer because I was so exhausted, like emotionally exhausted from like, the constant drama that they were inducing. But yeah, I mean, it doesn't thankfully, like, I don't have kids, like my stressor was like, my dogs, but hasn't affected me too much. Like I've been lucky like, seniority wise, I get a good schedule and then, like I pick up enough overtime to not get drafted when I don't want to be.

Dispatcher 4 spoke about how dispatchers cannot prepare for when they will get

mandated to holdover:

Being a dispatcher is hard, hard, because you can always say well, I might have to be held over two hours because someone didn't show up. Or I might get mandated on this day, that I only want to work my shift because I've other you know what I mean? Like and you can't plan that out? You don't know. And it's hard to say that to you know, your child, your eight- or nine-year-old or be like, Yeah, Mommy wants to be there, but she can't. Yeah. So difficult. And then just in general, with the job in general, a lot of people don't understand what our job is. And as much as I do think 911 is trying to change that perception of like getting, the dispatchers help and allowing them off the floor. With how fast we can lose people and how our staffing can go from overly staffed to understaffed. You know, very quickly, it makes it difficult to be able to do that. I think there needs to be some way of handling the systematic calls of like, repeat offenders here.

Dispatcher 5 shared a similar statement, "short staffed, having to work overtime or staying later than scheduled shifts or coming in earlier than your scheduled shift."

Dispatcher 8 spoke about her schedule currently and being short staffed:

So currently, I am on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. shift, and every other Mondays is seven to 3 p.m. However, due to our extreme

low staffing every Monday has been mandated seven to 3 p.m. or six to 12 or six to 6 p.m. And there is a draft is or drafting hours which I'm usually drafted on Fridays to work a 12-hour shift.

Overall, staffing has an effect not only on a dispatcher's personal life, but working so many days can impact one's mental health. Staffing can also affect the public and officers' safety. When a 9-1-1 police dispatcher becomes emotionally drained from working so much, they do not want to do their best, which is critical and can place a civilian, or officer, in a dangerous situation. This situation can also lead to a dispatcher quitting because they are working so many excessive hours.

### **Health**

Seven of 10 participants had comments on their overall health. The 9-1-1 police dispatcher's health was predominantly affected by sleep. Overall, shift workers tend to be repeatedly sleep deprived. It is very hard for night shift workers to get sufficient sleep during the day. It was the next biggest stressor for 9-1-1 police dispatchers. Dispatcher 3 shared:

A lot of my stress symptoms have been in regard to like sleep, and lack of just with balancing work and home and all that kind of stuff and even some of the like nastier or uncomfortable calls that I've taken. I get a lot of really bad nightmares. When I can sleep, I get nightmares and so I'll wake up after like two hours and like have nightmares are replayed over again in my head. And then we got like, can't go back to sleep. And I'm up like every hour. And finally, after like five or six hours I give up. And so that's one of the big areas that I've noticed that stress impacts me is my sleep.

Dispatcher 4 spoke about being so exhausted but still being unable to sleep:

Um, there are definitely some days that it's hard for me to sleep, have that kind of like insomnia. Usually, it might last like a day or two. Where, for whatever reason, I could be dead tired, but I can't go to sleep or my mind is always racing, I have a really hard time shutting off my mind. Even when I'm falling asleep, I have to be like dead tired. To the point where, you know, they're always like, when you're a little kid, like go count the sheep, like that'll help you fall asleep.

Like, I literally will count numbers in my head to fall asleep to the point where I am bored. So that's why I fall asleep. I've never really had much of like the muscle aches or the change in attitude or anything like that. Mostly just the not being able to shut off my brain not being able to just let it rest. Yeah, usually I'm constantly doing something until even when I'm laying in bed, like I'll wash my phone for a little while to make myself tired enough to fall asleep.

Dispatcher 1 share she thought their lack of sleep was due to stress:

So, I don't know how much of my stress is related to the job and how much is related to personal but for me, I don't sleep. I don't sleep very well at all. Surprisingly, I don't have a lot of nightmares. So that's something so when I do sleep, I have weird dreams, but they're not necessarily nightmares.

Dispatcher 6 shared her technique of writing things down when they cannot sleep:

Oh, well, I sleep okay, like, I'm so tired that I sleep. Okay, but like, I think it depends on to like, because I let [my dog] sleep with me like, he wakes me up a lot. So, like last night we both—he didn't move at all. So, I slept like seven hours like my watch told me I had great sleep. But like, the night before I had four hours, because he had me awake like every hour, because he had an ear infection. Oh, no. I have learned that like if I try and go to bed and I'm like thinking about a lot of stuff. I write it down, like in my phone. So, then I can like, stop thinking about it, like not stressed about forgetting about doing something.

Dispatcher 7 spoke about how their brain will not shut off:

Um, problems sleeping? One that is a well-known one, I have a really hard time. Some nights being I can fall asleep fine but staying asleep. My brain just won't shut off. Or I keep thinking about things that happened during the day and then how I would do it different. So yeah, it affects my it definitely affects my sleep. I would say that it's probably 75% of the week that it affects my sleep pattern in some way form or fashion. So probably mostly while I work.

Dispatcher 8 shared her exhaustion of lack of sleep due to the short turnaround time between shifts:

Oh, yeah, sleep definitely sleeps a big problem. I've noticed that my sleep has gone pretty terrible. Due to the long shifts, it forces you to lose the amount of sleep in between the shifts. Yeah, a minimum of eight hours in between shifts. But because the shifts are 12 hours, you're already losing a good amount of the day. I mean, nowadays I would prefer to pry and probably prefer to work for 10 At this rate. But the problem is, is that when we work 12-hour shifts, and then we get drafted for more and still getting drafted for 16 [hours]. I like loss of sleep is

like common or it's like a just normal thing that they want us to understand that it's normal or just accept it depending on the shift I'm usually on day shift when you get off of work, the stress, stress high. The adrenaline from the stress is so high that you take it home with you. So, if you don't do any working out or I don't know some type of cardio or something after work, you're going to experience burnout. So, then you just come home moody, or you come home like unmotivated or tired or depressed hatched so that's common to

The second health-related issue that affected them was their appetite. Dispatcher 5 shared, "I would attribute my 20-pound weight gain during training to it. It was extremely stressful." Dispatcher 1 also shared similar, "I stress eat, and I know it. I'm an emotional eater." Dispatcher 10 shared:

Um, I'll notice my appetite will change. I will either go from one to the other where I won't eat. I'm not hungry. Because my stomach is in knots. or stomach feels like a black hole. And I'm constantly eating. It's like one or the other. There's no middle when I'm stressed out. Probably if it's only a really stressful shifts, then I'll be all shifts. Like all I won't eat. And I'll get home and wonder why I have a huge headache.

Sleep, appetite, long shifts, racing thoughts, and lack of work-life balance were some of the health issues when it came to a 9-1-1 police dispatcher's health. The issues with sleep included stress, continually thinking about various things, and time between shifts. The issues with appetite included overeating due to the hours worked or stress, or not enough causing headaches.

### **Theme 3: Coping Mechanisms**

Several variables are consistent with participants regarding coping mechanisms that relate to 9-1-1 police dispatching career. The long-term dispatchers worked to find mechanisms that work for them over time. The following findings were generated from the participants when discussing coping mechanisms, which included (a) Coping at Work; (b) Coping Outside of Work; (c) Resources; (d) Training.

## Coping at Work

The participants expressed several ways they cope during their downtime at work. Several coping mechanisms that dispatchers used included reading, talking to their coworkers, music, and walking. All participants had ways that helped them at work. Dispatcher 7 enjoys, "Talking with my peers seeking advice, asking them how they handle the situation." Dispatcher 8 enjoys, "Listening to music stretching making sure to stand up and stress stretch and look outside the window every hour." Dispatcher 10 enjoys, "Taking deep breaths. Um, sometimes I'll go to the bathroom and just sit in there for the peace. Go walk around the ramp." Dispatcher 5 enjoys, "I go for a walk on my breaks I will try to laugh a lot and make jokes as a de-stressor are talking talk to people about other things other than worked." Dispatcher 1 went into detail about their downtime:

During my shift, when it's downtime. I have a Kindle and I read. But I have always found reading to be an escape, a way of de-stressing a little bit. And it's something that I can do, while still keeping an ear one year to the radio and one air to the phones. So, if something blows up on someone else's line or someone else's channel, I can clue into it. I also play music low. Occasionally I'll turn on for background noise, something like Golden Girls. Because you don't have to think about it. You don't have to follow it to catch the plot. But it makes me laugh. So just stuff like that to kind of lightened some of the heaviness that can fall in the room. And our group, we are small enough that you can walk up, I can walk up to someone, or they can walk up to me we can have a five, seven-minute conversation and then walk away. And it's okay because it's just, it's a way of connecting with a human being that does not necessarily involve crisis, because we connect with those humans on the radio and on the phones. But a normal day for us is their worst day. And on my break, I go in and bake something, I'll throw it into the oven and someone else can pull it out when it's ready. And it's not necessarily that I want to eat it, but I want to bake it for baking.

Dispatcher 3 also spoke about music:

During my shift, I'll be honest, I put on Piano Jazz music on my Spotify in the background on my computer. And it plays just ever so softly in the background,

that it doesn't affect, like my hearing of the calls or anything. But when I'm not on the phone, or if there's no radio traffic, like I can just sit there and whoosah with my jazz in it. It keeps like a sense of like, low normal noise instead of the constant buzzing and ringing of phones and stuff. And then instead, I try and take my breaks if I can just at least get out of the room and take a breather. But I'm not great at it. I know I need to do better. I tell my trainees that. Do as I say not as I do, because I'm not good at following my own advice.

Dispatcher 2 spoke about connecting with coworkers and walking:

Um, I do like to get up from my desk and whether it's walk around and go have a conversation with you know, one of my peers or just get up and away from my desk for a second just to kind of disconnect or even if it's for the short walk while you go to the restroom, or you go get some water or you go heat up your lunch or whatever the case may be. But having conversations like that, and just disconnecting for a couple minutes and walking away, kind of, you know, get that adrenaline moving in the right direction. Get it out of your head, but pretty much you know, feel like that kind of helps. Obviously taking breaks is really, really important because I do feel a lot better after I go for a walk and come back in the room. So, I do know that breaks are very, very, very helpful, but, and sometimes I'll play a game or two on my phone just to distract myself if there's nothing going on.

Dispatcher 4 spoke on how speaking to others is helpful to her:

Um, I like to talk. And I find it helpful to just to kind of just talk to people around you and just kind of subsided anxiety with getting to know the people you work with and getting to be personable with them. And realizing that we all kind of have share the same anxiety, or we share the same stressors. So sometimes, it's nice to joke about that, or to find funny memes. And to be able to laugh that out with somebody else is helpful. I also have gotten into the [City] wellness so that I do walk a lot. So, on my breaks, I do tend to try to get out of the area where we work and just walk around, even if it's something as simple as I just am walking laps on outside, or I'm gonna go downstairs and get a drink and you know, watch a little TV or whatever.

Dispatcher 9 shared how she enjoys several ways cope during work:

I walk on all my breaks and my lunch so like I tried to remove myself from the room and then which actually does help because I can like listen to music and just kind of be away from all of it. to know the only other thing I was gonna say was that like, it really helps when you have like a good relationship with your coworkers. Because when there is something that's really stressful going on, if you have people that you can talk to or joke around with or kind of like a relieve that tension that helps.

Dispatcher 6 shared about how animals help her de-stress:

I guess just like being able to like talk about stuff in the room. Like if there's a stressful call. But a lot of the like, admin stuff that I stress about is just internal. I stressed by myself in the back. Yeah, we have a puppy camera. So, we watch all the puppies at the dog park because that helps. But usually, it's once I get home and I can vent about how shitty my day is, then, then then better.

Overall, there were several ways that dispatchers managed to cope during their work hours. Exercise, reading, music and talking to fellow coworkers seemed to be the best way to cope throughout a shift. The consensus was getting out of the room is the best solution to de-stress, even if it is for a few minutes. Some departments may not be able to support an employee leaving the room which can add more stress to an individual.

### **Coping Outside of Work**

Ten out of 10 participants had some way they coped outside of work. For some it was their spouse. Dispatcher 7 explained, "I talked with [my husband]. He's my sounding board. He has a good understanding of what we do and how it impacts us. And I'm lucky and able enough to be able to talk to him about it to help get those things off my chest."

Exercise was another way dispatchers coped outside of work. Dispatcher 8 described, "Making sure to work out or go to the gym, after work. Enjoy the things that I like or enjoy my sports on my days off or hanging out with friends or family on my days off."

Although Dispatcher 5 felt, "I haven't found a good way to manage outside of work. I do enjoy spending times with my kids." However, Dispatcher 1 enjoyed various things:

So, I we have our animals, I have my kids. Again, I read I don't, I don't necessarily watch a whole lot of TV. Unless it's cooking shows, I will admit to having a bit of an obsession with cooking shows. But I also bake. So, I like to do stuff like that once we just moved into the new house, my kitchen is nowhere near

setup. So, once it is I can start baking again. And baking for me is very cathartic. There's been a couple of times where I have ingredients at the call center at the unit. And then when it gets really bad once my Happy Places the beach. So, I'll go spend a couple of days at the beach and I'll be better.

Dispatcher 2 spoke about still trying to figure out ways to find coping

mechanisms outside of work:

Honestly, I feel like I'm still trying to figure out what's going to work for me. Yeah. There's a lot of moving parts in my life. With the combination of stress from work stress from, you know, the home life, it's something that I'm still trying to figure out. So, your three days that you [are] off, you're completely crashed, and you're just overly overworked and exhausted. So as far as coping, I try to push myself to get stuff done. I just currently, like recently downloaded an app, an app that's just helping me organize my week more, where it's gonna help me come up with a routine. So, certain days I have certain goals to meet, like, you know, my Monday off is my days of cleaning all my bathrooms in my house or Tuesdays are for laundry and stuff like that. Like it just kind of holds accountable and stuff helps you plan a daily routine. So, I'm trying to do that. And then like I said, just trying to find what's going to work for me as far as stress relief. You know, and spending some more me time where I'm alone, away from my children away from my home and away from work. Yeah, but it's a learning thing. I just I have to learn what's going to work for me and I like I said, I just I'm not there yet. I'm not really sure. But I'm aware that I need to do it. If that makes a difference.

Dispatcher 3 shared about disconnecting from work:

One of the big things that's helped me is completely disconnecting from work on my days off, even though my husband and I work for the same agency. We try not to talk about work on days off. Just because we've been inundated with it for so many days, and make sure we're like, we always do something to get outside. You know, as in dispatch, we're always stuck in that room. And we have a nice big window that we can look out, but we don't ever actually get to go outside. And so, it's kind of nice to on our days off to, like, make sure I'm outside, I'm running errands and like, not just at home, and, you know, feeling trapped, I always make sure to like get myself out or get myself to do something to balance out the like feeling trapped in in the dispatch center for a week.

Dispatcher 4 shared how important it is taking time for yourself:

Um, you definitely have to take time for yourself. And I'm wanting to talk because I have a very hard time myself. But you do, you have to find something that is an outlet for you, whether it's walking, or playing video games, or listening

to music or going for a drive, or whatever it is for you bowling, you know, going out hanging with friends, retail therapy, whatever it is, you have to find something that will just let you be you. and not think about life. And think about it. Just like anything. If you allow yourself to eat, drink, breathe this job, you will die in this job. That's probably one thing too. I don't really talk about work once I come home. Like, you know, my husband will ask me how was your day? It was fine. Like if there's anything remarkable thing. I'll be like, oh my god, like this happened. Nine times out of 10. I don't bring homework. They don't need to know about it, I mean, ignorance is bliss. Also, I don't live where I work, because I'd rather not know what happened where I live. Although I know it's not perfect. No places but so those are kind of some of the like, way I manage it is to realize like where you live not perfect. You also have to realize there's a lot of evil in this world. At the same time, you can only control a certain amount like you still have to allow you to live, and like they can't be in a bubble of a world to yeah, feel that one. No, a little girl. I'm like, watching, so paranoid. Sometimes It's hard, it is hard. And I've noticed some people in my life have helped me be less paranoid, or more like you can't, you can't hold them on so tight. Because eventually if you do, they're going to just break out of that mold anyway then probably do something way worse than you ever wanted them to.

Dispatcher 6 enjoys working out but also self isolates:

Um, for me, it was working out. I always felt like making sure I was working out a couple of days a week always helped with like, the extra like, energy or like, getting rid of like, just all the crap that we dealt with during the week. I am having good friends like that. I know that I could talk to you like it helps that I have two best friends. Oh, you didn't do it. Like having, being able to like talk. Like if I'm having a bad day, like, I know that I have like good core friends that I can count on. And even though sometimes Wanda is not very helpful, I know, I know that sometimes I like to self-isolate, just to like be by myself because I want to like process a week or whatever is been going on like, which I know is not always be the healthiest, but it's one of my coping mechanisms that I've learned. I don't drink or do drugs. I stay home and watch Netflix by myself with my dog.

Dispatcher 9 also enjoys exercise and counseling:

Exercise really helps. I don't do it as much as I should. But like, I did find, I used to go to the gym after work. And I did find that that like, helps so much, just to like, sweat it out. And then, I mean, I go to counseling, I do see a therapist a couple of times a week. Or not a couple of times a week, a couple of times a month. Oh my gosh. I see. I mean, I go to counseling, like sometimes every week sometimes every other week. Yeah, I spend time with like friends and family. My dog really helps. He's not an emotional support dog technically, but he's my emotional support dog. But yeah, I think that just like surrounding myself with like positive things outside of work. Really helps deal with it. But the exercise

Yeah, I used to go to the gym after work. And that was like the best because it was a He sweat out all that garbage and all that stress that had built up over 10 or 12 hours.

Dispatcher 10 spoke on the various ways she copes outside of work:

Um, on my days off, like, I'd like to exercise workouts really make me feel better. And I like reading. So that's like an escape, especially if it's a really good book. I think that helps me get through. And then I'm happy hours. I agree. That just really takes away you know, especially if you're drinking like some alcoholic drinks takes like candy. So, it's just like an adult tea.

Altogether, the participants discussed their various ways to manage. Exercise, spending time with family, and disconnecting appear to be the most popular way. Finding something to manage outside of work is important, so your life does not revolve around the job.

### **Department Resources**

Having the right resources in the 9-1-1 police dispatcher career can assist in dealing with the stress that comes along with the career. Every agency offered an EAP and Peer Support. The police department in Arizona also had a quiet room and access to an app called Bullet Proof. The police department in California has chaplains available. Some dispatchers were even members of the Critical Incident and Support Management (CISM)/Peer Support team. All participants spoke about available resources provided to them. Dispatcher 1 discussed the resources available:

EAP and an app, I can't remember the name. But the Peer, peer-to-peer support, peer support, which I know it's there. Honestly, it's not one I'll use because I realized that they are, it's supposed to be confidential, and they are sworn to secrecy and all of that but it's just me I don't necessarily feel comfortable. So, it's available, but it's not one that I personally will use. There's always unofficially someone within the unit that you can talk to.

Dispatcher 2 spoke about being on Peer Support:

Being part of the peer support, I have learned a lot. I did learn that your adrenaline base is always up here when you're at work. And when you're at home, it's down here, right? And your body wants to be up here the entire time. But there's nothing to push up here. On your adrenaline, there's nothing to raise your adrenaline. So, when you're at home, you don't feel like yourself. Because you're so used to being at this high adrenaline rush. Where you're at home, you're just not getting that. So, I did learn that it's a normal feeling to feel like.

Dispatcher 6 shared about how her department helped another agency when an officer died while at work:

Um, so I'm actually on peer support. And I have never been contacted, myself, by anyone. But I am. I've heard that like, other people have, like, are reached out to win. [City] lost their officer, like our peer support went over there. And we just like, I just sat in there and just like talk to the girls and like would give them breaks if they needed it and answer phones. And they said like, just the support was super helpful. So, like, we have a list of people that are like IOD [injury on duty], or like sick or family members passed away. So, like we can reach out to them. And then if they want to talk to us, they talk to us, but I feel like it's hard because like some of these people I'm so close with like, there's like that fine line of like, hey, this is so personal between you and me and like, hey, I'm here support like, don't tell me anything. A quiet room? No, not really. If there's any debriefing, they do in an actual Briefing Room. Like after a big call, like a baby died, they'll do a debrief and they invite us, which is nice.

Dispatcher 10 spoke about other resources she has used:

Oh, we have that peer Wellness Department that I don't think I ever used myself. Yeah, but um, I think I've read like a couple books where they've given examples like, like stressful leavers is taking three deep breaths and going for a walk I don't like that quick. Dispatch, I want to get away from the noise. So, as long as you can still hear the phone ringing, phones ringing and people yelling across the room, I feel I can't sit in that quiet room [because you can still hear the overflow ringing] .... But other than that, we only, we only see them [peer support] when there's an event which I get it. They're only going to come. Yeah. But when they after an event, they're really good at contacting us now in the last year. Prior, we weren't too involved for closure.

Dispatcher 7 shared all the various resources available and felt support from her manager if anyone needs resources:

We have the peer support program, and the CISM (crisis incident stress management) program that the town offers. I'm not sure what else but I'm sure if

we approached our you know, [manager], she would do whatever we needed to do. Help us find out more resources. I know we have the EAP program too. Oh, yeah, we have the quiet room, we have the gym downstairs. Yeah, I mean, you could take 15 minutes or however much you needed and just go walk around the building if you needed, too.

Dispatcher 9 shared about debriefs:

So, we have officers that are like wellness officers, I guess. They do debrief like after more stressful calls. They have gotten really good about including dispatch into it. So, they'll reach out to you. And they're strictly for like PD [police department] employees, like they're not they're sworn officers. But they're not on the street. They're like in a building. There's like some other I can't remember what it's called. But there's this other resource guide, but I've never used it... And then there's like this is, which is this CISM team, which is like a combination of like sworn and non-sworn. Again, they are also involved in events to check. So, you know, that's all I have. Yeah, if that's all that there is, this is an impure support. But that's only, like, that's only there if you request it or you need, you know what I mean? Like, that's not something that is automatic, I guess, I think it would be a good idea to have like a training. And maybe that's something that we could look at as a center. Like building and developing and doing and like I mean, I think even like, annually, like maybe you do like an academy when you get hired on. And then do like an annual training like, hey, guy, don't forget about this stress.

Dispatcher 4 shared potential future resources:

Yeah, um, so I think honestly, the biggest part for me, I think, is the peer support team or being or like the bulletproof app where you could just text somebody and be like, hey, like, I just need a resource for this, or what do you suggest for this? So, I think that's the biggest to me. And then not, I mean, it is with the agency, but 100 Club [their mission is to provide financial assistance to families of first responders who are seriously injured or killed in the line of duty] have a lot of resources too, and once you kind of get involved in that, and you find someone, you can always just text or reach out to somebody. And they're available to anyone within, you know, Arizona or the United States, because they have chapters all over the nation. Oh, the time? Yeah. So, it's like a new thing that's coming out. I know that Gilbert said that they're still trying to work out the logistics and the legal aspect of it. But what it is, is this, they have found that working this type of job, and especially like PD dispatch, that it kind of rewires your brain a little bit. And so, what they do is you put on this like VR [virtual reality] headset, and it has different lights in it. And by sitting there and doing it for 10, 15, 20 minutes at a time, and help to rewire your brain to what it used to be and to open up some of the pathways that you have that maybe blocked or cause

you stress and helps you to be able to sleep better not always constantly thinking like, let your brain rest.

Dispatcher 3 spoke about resources coming at the wrong time:

We, and I'll play devil's advocate here, like so some of the bigger calls, like the assistant chief will come in and like, like five minutes after and be like, how's everybody doing? And I'm like, we're always just standing. Yeah, just stand there. And they're like, do you guys need anything? I'm like, this happened like five minutes ago. We're still processing. We're still like, go away. You asking us if we're, okay? Right now? Like we're not okay. We're in the middle of it still like, Yeah, but there's no follow-up after. There's no like the next day like checking in. Hey, how are you doing? Hey, did you want to meet? Hey, do you want to debrief like there's none of that? They just are like, oh, I'll just walk in as the incidents unfolding. And then I'll leave because I did my part. And that's it. And I'm like, it doesn't feel supportive.

Altogether, it appears that each department has multiple resources available.

These resources include Peer Support, chaplains, an app called Bullet Proof, CISM, EAP, quiet rooms, and debriefs after a critical incident. It is not clear if the dispatchers utilize these resources, but they are available to assist when a traumatic event occurs, or other things are going on in a dispatcher's life.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 provided the participants' demographics, validity and accuracy, and a discussion of the findings that emerged from the research. Data were collected from the participants, transcribed, analyzed, categorized, and coded. Field notes were taken as well and assisted in organizing the data more efficiently. The interview questions yielded insight into the stressors and coping of 9-1-1 police dispatchers at two agencies, one in Arizona and one in California. Past research has presented minimal data on the 9-1-1 profession.

Chapter 5 will include the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies, implications from the study, conclusion of the study, and recommendations for future research concerning 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to discover how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers prevent and/or recover from burnout. The use of studies has allowed for an exploration of perseverance and resilience in numerous emergency service occupations, such as police officers and paramedics. However, a review of the literature revealed inadequate information on stress and coping mechanisms in 9-1-1 police dispatchers (Baek et al., 2015; Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Kirkegaard & Brinkmann, 2015; Richardson & James, 2017). This study was conducted to provide insights into and to add to the literature on accessibility to the stressors and coping mechanisms to assist in preventing and/or recovering from burnout of 9-1-1 police dispatchers.

Chapter 5 contains a summary of this study that encompasses a discussion of the three main themes that emerged from individual interviews. This study found that 9-1-1 police dispatchers experience a variety of stressors, both internally and externally to the profession. Further, this study found a variety of coping strategies while at work and at home for this population as well. There is not a one-size-fits-all method to the stressors or coping strategies for this subcultural group. The recognized stressors and coping strategies are like those of other emergency service personnel with the addition of some exclusive to the 9-1-1 police dispatch profession (e.g., processing a call with verbal information only).

### **Discussion of Research Questions and Findings**

The structure of the findings was framed by the 10 participants who voluntarily participated in the study. Data were gathered using 18 questions that arose from the following three research questions:

- RQ1: What are the perceptions of the work stressors of a 9-1-1 police dispatcher?
- RQ2: How does a 9-1-1 police dispatcher describe their coping strategies to manage these stressors to prevent burnout?
- RQ3: What types of resources do 9-1-1 police dispatchers' access for their mental health/wellness? If they do not access any, or have any available, what would they like to see their department offer?

The researcher used field notes and a Word document to form and scrutinize data and then identified themes related to the research questions. Three themes formed included stress, work/life balance, and coping mechanisms.

### **Research Question One**

Research question one is, what are the perceptions of the work stressors of a 9-1-1 police dispatcher? The purpose of this research question was to understand how 9-1-1 police dispatchers perceive stress in the workplace. Perspectives, understanding, experience with, and impact of stress were discussed to support the participants; views in answering RQ1. This research question corresponds to the themes of stress and work/life balance.

### ***Lack of Management and Structure***

One of the most consistent comments from the participants in this study was the lack of management and structure within the department. Six participants spoke negatively about their management. Due to the growth of each city, participants felt the need for more structure to get breaks and to grow their staffing. More structure would relieve the burden of each employee's ability to get out of the room to decompress.

Because of outdated policies, change and growth among the leadership is needed along with more transparency in communication and understanding of why decisions are being made.

### ***Feeling Overwhelmed***

The four supervisors felt the daily stress of being overwhelmed in their position. When supervisors must help answer the phones, or dispatch on the radio, as well as supervise the room or complete projects, it feels like a high demand. Extra responsibilities add to the daily stress. If there is more staffing to assist in the room, supervisors can then supervise without getting pulled in multiple directions. Supervisors can then know what is going on, so they feel like they are not behind on information.

### ***Uncertainty***

The data also revealed a consistent response of feeling the uncertainty of the job. Nothing is routine as a 9-1-1 police dispatcher. The dispatchers take the initial call and sometimes do not find out what occurred during the call. Having closure on an incident assist in easing all the questions a dispatcher may have about what happened. The lack of closure can also occur during radio transmission when an officer yells out for help. The uncertainty of what is going on can be extremely stressful and finding out if the officer is okay is helpful in easing a 9-1-1 police dispatcher's anxiety that incident arose during the incident.

### ***Exposure to Traumatic Events***

Almost all the 9-1-1 police dispatchers described that hearing a citizen's worst day can be very difficult. More stress is added with language barriers due to an initial delay in helping someone. 9-1-1 police dispatchers think about if they have done

everything to help someone as quickly as possible. Some of the dispatchers revealed that they have different types of calls that bother them more than others. Recognizing what these events are can be helpful in managing daily stress. These incidents can also apply to officer-involved incidents. When a dispatcher hears someone in distress, those memories can stay with a dispatcher. One way to assist with this burden is to have a support system outside of work in easing the stress of what goes on at work.

### ***Coworkers***

9-1-1 police dispatchers described that there could be a clash in various work personalities. This clash can affect their work environment. Many participants described that job is so difficult already that when other employees are negative, it can create a toxic work environment. Some of the 9-1-1 police dispatchers felt a divide between patrol and dispatch. There seems to be a lack of communication and understanding of each other's job.

### ***Shiftwork***

Eight of 10 participants talked about how shiftwork is a big stressor. It can be difficult to find a good work-life balance when a dispatcher schedule can revolve around nights, weekends, and holidays. It is particularly hard when you have young children because it can be difficult to get childcare. As children get older and they want their parents to be at their activities, which are usually in the evenings or on the weekends when one may have to work. Some participants spoke about how hard-working night shift and how long hours affect your body. Shiftwork appears to affect dispatchers' sleep.

Because each department needs to be staffed 24/7, being short staffed on shift is not usually an option. If a department is short staffed, then 9-1-1 police dispatchers can

work multiple back-to-back shifts. Short staffing appeared to affect the 9-1-1 police dispatchers' mental health and can potentially affect what is going on in their home life. This effect can be portrayed in terms of exhaustion and not seeing their family.

### ***Health***

In terms of health, seven of 10 participants talked about being affected by sleep and eating. A few of the 9-1-1 police dispatchers gained weight after they were hired, the result of the stress of the job. Six participants talked about how shiftwork affected their sleep the most, which was due to having to come back for another shift the next day or their brain not shutting down at night to sleep. When 9-1-1 police dispatchers work various shifts, sometimes it is difficult to get to sleep or they do not make healthy choices when eating.

### **Research Question Two**

Research question two is, how does a 9-1-1 police dispatcher describe their coping strategies to manage these stressors to prevent burnout? The purpose of this research question was to understand what strategies 9-1-1 police dispatchers use to manage these stressors. Overtime, 9-1-1 police dispatchers learn and change their coping strategies to manage their stress. Research question two corresponds to the findings of coping at work and coping outside of work in theme three of coping mechanisms.

### ***De-stressing at Work***

9-1-1 police dispatchers can de-stress at work in several ways. All ten participants had something they used during work to assist in de-stressing during their shift. One way they do this is by reading in their downtime. They use this as an escape to assist in between calls. Many of the 9-1-1 police dispatchers play music or some type of

background noise. Another popular way to de-stress is by going for a walk. Getting out of the dispatch room helps them reset and get away from all the noise. Many of the dispatchers enjoy conversing among one another. This is a way to cope and discuss certain calls in detail.

### ***De-stressing Outside of Work***

All participants had various ways to cope outside of work. Many dispatchers enjoyed spending time with their animals, children/family, and friends. Disconnecting from work was especially helpful to avoid negative events all the time. They do this by not discussing work events or watching the news. Some enjoyed just getting tasks around the house complete and getting outside on their day off. A few dispatchers enjoyed doing some sort of exercise. The overall perspective was finding time for yourself and finding something you enjoy.

### **Research Question Three**

Research question three is, what types of resources do 9-1-1 police dispatchers' access for their mental health/wellness? If they do not access any, or have any available, what would they like to see their department offer? The purpose of this research question was to understand if 9-1-1 police dispatchers understand the types of resources are available at their department. Understanding and views about what is available and what 9-1-1 police dispatchers would like available impact mental health/wellness in answering RQ3. This research question corresponds to theme three coping mechanisms and the findings of department resources and training.

### *Available Department Resources*

All participants spoke about the resources available at their agency. Both departments had EAP, Peer Support, and access to invites to debriefs after a critical event occurs. The police department in California has one available resource different from Arizona, which is chaplains. However, the police department in Arizona has more available resources to 9-1-1 police dispatchers. These extra resources included an app called Bullet Proof, CISM, a quiet room, and the department is looking at future technology to assist with helping the brain rest and reset.

A few 9-1-1 police dispatchers were on the Peer Support team as well. Peer Support may contact some 9-1-1 police dispatchers after certain traumatic events, but it was not clear which events qualified. The dispatchers on Peer Support recognized how to use certain techniques to relieve stress, but those who had not been trained did not have these techniques. The consensus was that 9-1-1 police dispatch supervisors, who are on duty, do a good job of contacting employees to check in on them to ensure that they are getting whatever help they need.

### *Requested Department Resources*

Some of the 9-1-1 police dispatchers felt it would be a good idea to start training to let new and current dispatchers know about what resources are available in the departments. Some dispatchers felt it would be helpful to know what each resource is and how the resource can help them. Another item that would be helpful to 9-1-1 police dispatchers is ensuring that there is some type of follow-up in the future to see if dispatchers use these resources or what aspect of the resources need changing. In all the participants' experiences, unless they are on Peer Support, there is not much information

about how to help them during stressful, traumatic events. Additionally, as more states reclassify public safety dispatchers as first responders, further research should be directed to see if reclassification has assisted with providing more resources and staffing. Although the agency in California was reclassified, it did not appear to additional resources to assist with stress and burnout the 9-1-1 police dispatchers were experiencing.

### **Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement**

This study included information about an implication for social change via the identification of stressors and coping mechanisms of 9-1-1 police dispatchers at two similar 9-1-1 police departments. Current studies have discovered perseverance, susceptibility, resilience, and positive emotion in various populations yet little focus has been placed on 9-1-1 police dispatchers (Antcliff et al., 2014; Büssing et al., 2017; Regehr et al., 2013). The identification and exploration of stressors, leadership, work environment, coping practices, and available resources can tend toward better job gratification and performance and provide better service to the citizens (Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Hall, 2016; Sattler et al., 2014; Stafford, 2016; Vorell & Carmack, 2014). Resiliency and vulnerability are situational. For the purposes of this study, the researcher sought to identify the stressors and coping strategies of long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers at two police departments (Southwick et al., 2014). Vulnerability factors can increase the effects of risk factors on individuals, with no direct link between increased vulnerability factors and negative influences on individuals, however (Antcliff et al., 2014; de Visser et al., 2016; Southwick et al., 2014). Resiliency and the transactional theory of stress and coping researchers explain the healthy adaptation to opposing situations, can be trained, and strengthened (Baek et al., 2015; Southwick et al., 2014).

Resiliency is not fixed; an individual who is resilient in one condition may not be resilient in another (Antcliff et al., 2014; de Visser et al., 2016; Weltman et al., 2014). 9-1-1 police dispatchers often work long shifts, have irregular working, eating, and sleeping patterns, spend a lot of time away from their family, and have an assorted and uncertainty of call type and volume per shift (Cannuscio et al., 2016; Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; de Visser et al., 2016). Those who create positive adaptations to stressful circumstances displayed amplified resiliency and a more varied array of coping strategies (Baek et al., 2015; Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; de Visser et al., 2016). Recent studies have connected job satisfaction with the psychological well-being of the employee and job dissatisfaction has related to “spillover effects” in other portions of the employee’s life (Cannuscio et al., 2016; Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; Pezaro et al., 2016; Synard & Gazzola, 2017). Compassion fatigue and burnout are conducive factors to job satisfaction and turnover yet more studies are needed within this population (Smoktunowicz et al., 2015; Upadyaya et al., 2016; Haunget al., 2015).

The 9-1-1 police dispatcher experiences similar psychological, physiological, and emotional stressors as other first respondents yet they are often unnoticed or ignored in the communication sequence (Büssing et al., 2017; Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2012; de Visser et al., 2016; Lilly & Allen, 2015). To continue, 9-1-1 police dispatchers must rely exclusively on verbal cues from the callers to distribute info to the responding units. The 9-1-1 police dispatchers frequently handle multiple calls concurrently with little or no downtime in between. The 9-1-1 police dispatchers can be seen as a subcultural group, sharing comparable features of other emergency first responders yet upholding their own specialized (occupational) uniqueness (Baek et al., 2015; Folwell & Kauer, 2018;

Kirkegaard & Brinkmann, 2015; Richardson & James, 2017). The operation of specific and collective coping strategies was noticeable in the 9-1-1 police dispatchers that contributed to this research (Baek et al., 2015; Burch & Anderson, 2013; de Visser et al., 2016; Folwell & Kauer, 2018). Emergency first responders, including 9-1-1 police dispatchers, work long hours, often in organized teams (Folwell & Kauer, 2018; Kirkegaard & Brinkmann, 2015). Richardson and James (2017) and Wagner and O'Neill (2012) explained that bonding with one's coworkers aided in the growth of a collective culture in which their communal values, beliefs, and coping strategies appeared and could be routinely applied.

### **Application to Leadership**

The social change inference begins with bringing mindfulness to frontline 9-1-1 police dispatchers, then to leadership, then administration, then road units, and finally the community at large (Harvey et al., 2015; Leinweber et al., 2017; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). The 9-1-1 police dispatchers answer emergency and nonemergency calls for service, often while dispatching and repeatedly apprising responding units with received information (Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). To continue, provoking information, providing directions to the caller, and constantly updating their peers are dynamic workings of the communications cycle. Peer and social support and self-efficacy were exposed to positively influence a participant's well-being while shift work was found to have undesirable influences on participants (Harvey et al., 2015; Leinweber et al., 2017; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). Employees are expected to be engaged and not to make any mistakes while processing high stress calls for service with restricted resources (Travis, Lizano, & Mor Barak, 2016; Regehr et al., 2013; Rivera, 2015). Reducing the

negative stigma surrounding stress and finding effective ways to address the exclusivity of this subculture is important in increasing the longevity of a 9-1-1 police dispatcher's career (Harvey et al., 2015; Leinweber et al., 2017; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015).

Teaching coping strategies and offering other training to combat stress would allow 9-1-1 police dispatchers to endure to add tools to alleviate stress and reduce burnout (Harvey et al., 2015; Leinweber et al., 2017; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). Further, management should work closely with the training staff and organization to establish these changes and arrange training to both veteran and newly hired 9-1-1 police dispatchers (Harvey et al., 2015; Leinweber et al., 2017; Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2015). Harvey et al. (2015), Leinweber et al. (2017), and Shakespeare-Finch et al. (2015) explained that when global communication and cooperative working together of all stakeholders to safeguard that all voices are heard, and all demands are met it can begin to shift negative views on stress.

To continue, administration and management can start to build open lines of communication in which 9-1-1 police dispatchers can voice concerns, brainstorm solutions, and assess department enterprises to generate an effective working environment and decrease turnover (Pierce & Lilly, 2013; Regehr et al., 2013; Stafford, 2016). More lines of communication are required to develop trust from administration to supervision and supervision to 9-1-1 police dispatchers (Pierce & Lilly, 2013; Regehr et al., 2013; Stafford, 2016). Administration and supervision must be open and willing to hear and attend to the needs of 9-1-1 police dispatchers, the department, and the public (Pierce & Lilly, 2013; Regehr et al., 2013; Stacey et al., 2017; Stafford, 2016). This study showed that many 9-1-1 police dispatchers feel that lack of communication contributes significantly to their aptitude to do their job, their job gratification, their ability to learn

new coping mechanisms, and their capability to aid the public, views that are similar to other emergency first responders (Pierce & Lilly, 2013; Regehr et al., 2013; Stafford, 2016). Listening, addressing, and changing the stigma associated with stress within the emergency service realm is essential to changing the culture and helping to safeguard that the best service accessible to the community is available.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The 9-1-1 police departments come in various makeups and structures. Some are merged while others maintain their separation. The 9-1-1 police department environment is frequently changing and demands that administrators and 9-1-1 police dispatchers be fluid, flexible, and persistently adaptable. Consideration from both internal and external stakeholders is necessary in a communications center's capacity to continue to advance toward meeting the requirements of the public being served. Internal stakeholders incorporate administrators and 9-1-1 police dispatchers; external stakeholders can involve the public, responding units, town council, community partners, among others. Some departments have come to recognize 9-1-1 police dispatchers as first responders. Progressing and developing a connection is a required factor to successful communication. A continual assessment of what is working, what is not, and ways to progress is needed to ensure that the needs of an ever-growing society are being served.

This current study exposed those 9-1-1 police dispatchers face both internal and external stressors. During the individual interviews, participants expressed the roots of stress both internally and externally of the communications center. Participants deliberated the characteristic parts of the profession (e.g., various levels of stress, shiftwork, work-life balance) while also conversing about the added components of

leadership decisions, work environment stress, and staffing shortages for one department. Further, participants spoke about worries with external sources to include family obligation.

As communication centers try to find more cost-effective ways to function, advance overall efficiency, and remain up to date with the most existing technology available, it is vital that they address the personnel challenges as well. Communications center administrations must acquaint themselves with the ever-evolving requirements of the employees and people that they serve. Administrations need to find ways to meet the desires of personnel while also meeting the requirements of the center. This change is vital in battling turnover and guaranteeing that the best possible service is obtainable for the citizens. Administration must also make work to guarantee open communication occurs to link 9-1-1 police dispatchers, road personnel, management, and the public. Communication centers have practical, intelligent thinkers and doers who can provide contributions to better the work atmosphere of the center, if given the chance. Further, with a decrease in turnover, more global, knowledgeable employees will be working on the floor, ready to respond to calls for service.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This phenomenological study examined ten 9-1-1 police dispatchers' perspectives from two similar police departs in California and Arizona. Future research studies should be directed in various environments (e.g., rural, urban, large, and small cities). Furthermore, this study solely focused on the experiences of 10 female 9-1-1 police dispatchers only. Although males were not excluded in the study, no males volunteered to participate. The addition of male participants in future studies will allow for their

experiences to be shared. And the comparison studies of female versus male counterparts could help recognize possible resemblances and differences in acknowledged stressors and coping strategies. In addition, examining how resources aid in reducing stress would also be beneficial in reducing burnout and turnover.

### **Concluding Statement**

This research amplified the present recognized body of information and delivered insight through the lived experiences of 10 female 9-1-1 police dispatchers in two similar police departments in California and Arizona. Previous research studies have focused on diverse forms of stress in a multitude of other emergency service occupations. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study is to discover how long-term 9-1-1 police dispatchers prevent and/or recover from burnout.

This study is unique as it brings visibility to a profession with minimal documented research. This research uncovered stressors and coping strategies of this exceptional subculture. Further, this study brought to light possible venues of development to identify, for example, available resources for improving wellness, training, and reducing burnout within the occupation. Proactive methods and constant research and training need to take place in addition to community awareness training to advance job gratification and overall community trust. Administrative and leadership styles should continue to be assessed for efficiency and continue to progress to meet the demands of employees and the community being served.

This study laid the groundwork for gathering information on stressors and coping strategies within this occupation via the lived experiences of the participants.

Conversations with participants of stressors and coping strategies were presented in this

study. Recommendations were made to contribute to the documentation of stressors, training on managing stressors, growing coping strategies, creating, and training on available resources, and increasing leadership and management communication and efficiency in this occupation. When employees function efficiently, there is augmented potential for better job gratification, less turnover, improved mental health, better association between police officers in the field and communication, and better service to the community. When all work together to create effective communication, it is possible to reduce the influence of stressors and improve coping methods.

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## APPENDIX A

## Interview Questions

**Date of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Time Started:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Time Finished:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant Number:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Race:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Current Department:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Position:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Years in Position:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Interview Questions:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What department do you work for?
  - Potential follow-up questions:
    - How many years have you worked in the 9-1-1 profession?
    - What do you do during your shift? (Answer phones, dispatch, admin, overflow, etc.)
2. What does a typical shift look like for you?
  - Potential follow-up questions:
    - Do you get a break?
      - When do you take your break?
      - How long is your break?
      - Who is your backup?
      - How effectively do you guys work together?
    - What type of calls/dispatching did you handle last shift?
    - Do any of them stand out as being more stressful than others?
3. What stressors do you feel are associated with the 9-1-1 profession?
  - Potential follow-up questions:
    - These can be either work or personally connected (e.g., childcare, shift selection, staffing, time of being denied, administrative support, social support, workload, and staffing level, overtime, sense of accomplishment, lack of resources, lack of control, appreciation, staffing, closure, feedback, sharing knowledge, scheduling and shift pick, etc).
4. Tell me about the daily stress of the job.
5. What key strategies do you find helpful to manage stress during your shift?
6. Tell me about the career stressors of the job.
7. What key strategies do you find help to manage stress throughout your career?

8. Have you ever left the 9-1-1 profession, or thought about leaving?
  - Potential follow-up questions:
    - How often do you think about it?
    - What stopped you from leaving?
    - If you did leave for a period of time, what made you want to come back?
9. Do you, or have you, experienced any stress symptoms?
  - Potential Follow up questions:
    - Can you tell me about it?
    - How long did the symptoms last?
10. What was the most memorable event in your career?
  - Potential Follow up questions:
    - What went well?
    - What could have been done differently?
    - What was most memorable about this event?
11. As a whole, what do you perceive to be the biggest stressor for you within the 9-1-1 profession and why?
12. How do you cope with stress?
  - Potential follow-up questions:
    - What tools, resources or strategies do you use to mitigate stress?
13. What resources are available from your agency?
  - Potential follow-up questions:
    - Do you have access to a gym or the ability to walk during your lunch break to burn off stress?
    - Do you have training on skills to learn different coping strategies?
    - Do you have access to professional counselors or EAP?
    - Do you have peer support?
    - Are there quiet rooms within the workplace for you to debrief?
14. What would you like to see offered to help prevent or manage stress more effectively?
  - Potential follow-up questions:
    - What could your peers do?
    - What could your supervisors do?
    - What could you do?
15. In what ways has this job positively impacted your life?
16. In what ways has this job negatively impacted your life?
17. What else would you like to share related to stress or coping?
18. If you could go back and give yourself advice for this career, what would you say?