

“I DON’T WANNA SOUND PARANOID BUT I’M NOT LIKELY TO TRUST PEOPLE”:

UNDERSTANDING WORK AND LIFE STRESSORS IN A SAMPLE OF  
FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

May 2017

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee for guiding me through this whole process. It has been tough but it was all worth it in the end. I would like to thank the chair of my committee, Dr. El Sayed, for giving me the honor of being her first mentee for a thesis. I have learned a lot from you and could not thank you enough for your spectacular guidance. Dr. Kerley, thank you for sharing your expertise and knowledge about the process and work that goes into a well-formed thesis. You made this a very enlightening experience. To my wonderful boyfriend, I couldn't have done this without your love and words of encouragement on days that I needed it. You made me believe that I am capable of whatever crosses my path. Thank you for the late nights that were filled with support and countless chocolate. I love you!

April 14, 2017

Abstract

UNDERSTANDING WORK AND LIFE STRESSORS IN A SAMPLE OF FEDERAL LAW  
ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

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Federal law enforcement officials risk their lives every day to serve and protect the community from those who break the law. Among today's society, the constant eye of the public and media can create stressors among federal officials. The participants in this study revealed what work-place events are perceived as stressors, which may potentially create an impact on their work and at home life, as well as coping mechanism they utilize to alleviate the identified stressors. Some of the impacts of work-place stress involved desensitization, unattachment, and psychological effects. Considering these effects, views from the public and the media can further negatively shape how federal law enforcement officials are viewed. Therefore, this research helps to understand the personal stressors that federal law enforcement officials undergo and the effects throughout the duration of their careers via qualitative interviews.

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**Introduction**

Perceptions of law enforcement officers long have been a concern for academics. Today's officers may be under more scrutiny than by members of the general public, media members, and policy makers – which can serve as a stressor. Although law enforcement officers can be harshly criticized for their actions on the job, the occupation is still seen as attractive to a large number of individuals. Intense scrutiny, along with many organizational challenges and dangers can create workplace stressors for officers, which may negatively impact them. For instance, research has found that stress can lead to serious issues for officers in their professional and personal lives if they do not adopt healthy coping mechanisms (Terry, 1983; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). Given that the bulk of research on the impact of work-related stress for law enforcement officials has been focused on state and local level officers, this study extends the literature to focus on federal law enforcement officers and to understand the impact of both personal and work experiences via in-depth interviews.

Being a law enforcement official is a career that involves several responsibilities such as, the prevention, investigation, apprehension, and/or detention of individuals convicted of or suspected of breaking criminal laws. All the while, law enforcement officials must protect the safety of citizens and themselves. It goes without saying that in the process of serving these duties, law enforcement officials have a high likelihood of encountering risky situations. In fact, every day routines on the job present their own scale of danger. Having to be in potentially dangerous situations frequently can take a toll on one's well-being—both physically and mentally. When studying the effects of different types of stressors on law enforcement officers, studies typically examine state and local law enforcement (Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Perez, Jones,

Englert, & Sachau, 2010; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Gul & Delice, 2011) but not officers at the federal level (but see Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). As such, there exists a noticeable gap in law enforcement research in that few studies have examined how workplace stressors affect federal law enforcement officers. While there are a few studies that have examined federal law enforcement officers (Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004), there is more that needs to be done.

## **Literature Review**

Being one of the nation's oldest federal agencies and most versatile, the U.S. Marshals Service undergoes stress both in the line of duty and in a traditional office setting (U.S. Marshals Service, 2017). The research that has been conducted on federal agencies does not go into detail on how stress affects the individual officer, but only elaborates on how stress affects officers as a unit (Hoffer, 1986; Linkins, 1997; Slate, 1997, Stutler, 2000; Stanton, 1985). Being able to identify the impacts of stress among officers individually has the potential of identifying a common theme on the underlying cause (Patterson, 1992) as well as any individual variation that may exist. Among the research that has been done within this topic, there has been three main commonalities of stress: 1) physiological strains (poor health, sleeplessness, aggressiveness), 2) psychological strains (e.g., cynicism, being judgmental), and 3) self-coping mechanisms (e.g., substance abuse, turnover, religion) (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Beehr, Johnson, & Nieva, 1995). The current study will implement measures of all three types of stress in order to examine: 1) different encounters of occupational stress (e.g., danger on the job, organizational challenges, negative portrayal from the media, unpredictability, monotony), 2) impacts of occupational stress (e.g., psychological effects), 3) coping (e.g., compartmentalization, focusing attention on others).



Another factor that most people do not consider is that law enforcement, especially federal, have a set of rules and guidelines that they have to follow. This also has the potential of creating stress when completing certain tasks such as chasing fugitives. While chasing fugitives, law enforcement has to factor in, not only the safety of their teammates but also the safety of the civilians in the surrounding areas—oftentimes these thoughts and decisions must happen instantaneously. This makes it even more difficult to obtain the fugitive in a manner that can be accepted by all and not give off a negative perception. With these varying stressors specific to their job, there is a possibility that workplace stressors impact federal law enforcement officers differently than it does local and state officers. To address this lacuna in the literature, the current study identifies if certain workplace stressors are characteristics that develop progressively over time or if they developed due to events on the job and whether this negatively influences federal law enforcement officers' work performance and personal lives. This study will contribute to the limited knowledge of the impact of workplace stress on federal law enforcement officers and to the author's knowledge, is the first qualitative study to examine the influence of workplace stress on federal law enforcement officers.

### ***What is stress?***

Stress can be defined differently by many people. Some might say it is a feeling of being overwhelmed. Others might say it is a state of mind that hinders you from moving forward in your daily activities. Bonato and colleagues (2013) define occupational stress as the psychological distress or strain that arises from individual and organizational stressors in the workplace. Another study identified stress as the body's reaction to stimuli (external and internal) that can disrupt the body's normal state (i.e. physical, mental, or emotional) (Dempsey,

1994). Such stress can also lead to officers feeling overworked and exhausted which can unveil a sense of burnout (Finn, 1998; Garland, 2004; Garcia, 2008). Overtime, burnout can be worse than stress because it can bleed into an officer's daily work routine and home life.

According to Newman and Rucker-Reed (2004), there have not been studies that evaluated if U.S. Marshals undergo the same type of stress that local level officers do. Since it is understood that work-place stress can lead to potentially harmful outcomes (e.g., organic diseases, emotional instability, psychological and physiological disorders), prevention should be developed to anticipate these results and work towards a realistic solution (Swanson, Territo, & Taylor, 1998; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). In their research, Newman and Rucker-Reed (2004) replicated a study by Storch and Panzarella (1996) that was done on the stress levels and stressors of police officers and applied it to U.S. Marshals. Data was collected anonymously through questionnaires that were sent out to deputies in numerous cities (Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). One hundred deputies responded to the questionnaire that was sent out. Newman and Rucker-Reed (2004) concluded that they discovered almost similar results to Storch and Panzarella's (1996) originally tested three hypotheses. The first hypothesis was evaluated to determine if negative stressors for U.S. Marshals were organizational and relationships with outsiders. This hypothesis was determined to be accurate and was cohesive with the findings of Storch and Panzarella (1996). The second hypothesis that was tested determined the amount of anxiety that is experienced by U.S. Marshals will not differ from adult normative samples. This happened to also correspond with the findings of Storch and Panzarella (1996) who studied police officers. The type of anxiety found in Newman and Rucker-Reed's study (2004) happened to be lower than the anticipated anxiety norms. The final hypothesis tested if anxiety levels of U.S. Marshals were significantly related to specific occupational and personal variables only. There were some

relationships that only existed within anxiety levels and occupational/personal levels. There were no relationships to be found with education and anxiety for the U.S. Marshals (Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). Storch and Panzarella (1996) also found that there was no correlation with education and anxiety for police officers.

Newman and Rucker-Reed (2004) also extend on findings from Norvell, Belles, and Hills (1988) on different kinds of stressors aside from organizational and inherent police stressors. Management administration was one of the dislikes that was mentioned more often by their respondents. Similar to the present study, Norvell et al. (1988) found that there was often conflict among subordinates and management that engaged their stress (Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). Having such stress, with the pressure and responsibility from management, also contributed to stress while being a line officer (Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004).

Just like any other public servant, most officers eventually experience burnout (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). Burnout is considered a long-term reaction to stress and is developed gradually over time (Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993; Leiter, 1993; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). Once an officer has experienced burnout, a sense of detachment and cynicism can overcome their mental state at work—this can be viewed as one type of coping mechanism adopted in a high-pressure occupation (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). Those who become detached and cynical may perceive traumatic events such as death or extreme danger as normal and do not think twice about it when it occurs. Approaching a job with a detached or cynical perspective can automatize a law enforcement official and the suspects they frequently come into contact with. There is a possibility that a law enforcement official can approach every encounter the same way every time and not break it down for what is actually happening.

The literature on police officers serves as an extended example of what might be found at the federal level. It expands the understanding of whether the stressors that are typically experienced among all law enforcement officials have an impact on their professional and personal lives. Stress, acute or chronic, can have the possibility of being detrimental to a person's well-being. To name a few, stress can lead to absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, burnout, weakened immune system, or increased illness (Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas, 2002). Law enforcement is an extremely stressful job and has the potential of damaging the body's physiology when encountering a constant "flight or fight" mode. An emotional response to a work-place stressor can vary from person to person but the physiological response of a stressor will remain constant (Anderson et al. 2002). Although acute stress may not seem as detrimental as chronic stress, if an officer does not have well developed coping skills, the acute stress can be the initiation of chronic stress.

According to a recent study, Anderson and colleagues (2002) used heart monitors to measure heart rate for stressors that were reported by police officers along with any consistencies. Among the 297 surveys that were sent, 287 officers responded. In regards to the usage of heart monitors, 121 officers were examined during their ride along exercise. It was determined that higher levels of stress occurred during a "physical stress" activity that required a flight or fight response. By analyzing the effects of acute and chronic stressors, it was determined that most stressors are anticipatory with a maximum level during or before a critical incident. Anderson et al. (2002) measured the heart rates of their officers to determine what each individual considers a critical incident. This study was able to identify that police officers experience physical and psychological stress on the job. Due to the maximum level of stress that was caused, it was noted that police officers were able to rapidly recover and bring their heart

rates to nearly resting (Anderson et al. 2002). Having identified this, it was seen that police officers encountered temporary periods of anticipatory stress during their work day. However, Anderson and colleagues (2002) did not conduct a longitudinal study to identify potential repressive behavior. The current study will attempt to recognize any behavior that may have been developed by federal officers during the duration of their professional career.

### ***Outside Relationships***

When a spouse is stressed, it seems only logical that the stress can overflow and effect the other spouse as well. Beehr et al. (1995) believed that an officer's coping activities can be less or more effective and reflect from the activities that their spouse is engaging in. Beehr et al. (1995) also argued that coping activities, when there is someone to come home to, are never done alone. Meaning, police and their spouses tend to engage in similar coping mechanisms when they encounter stress. Some researchers have gauged at least 9 categories that characterize for potential coping mechanisms, beginning with the most common being the "macho", also known as the drinking coping mechanism (West & West, 1989). Suicide and divorce followed closely behind drinking as a coping mechanism that is easy to implement (West & West, 1989). As mentioned previously, being a federal law enforcement official can be emotionally exhausting. It can affect a person physically and emotionally due to the demands of the job and is considered to be a predictor of constant negative outcomes in and out of the work environment such as lack of stability in relationships, lack of communication, avoiding display of emotion, and interpersonal conflicts. (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998, p.486; Roberts & Levenson, 2001).

In many instances, what a person experiences at work can be more crucial to their home life as opposed to the amount of hours that they have worked. Jackson, Zedeck, and Summers

(1985) found that spouses' satisfaction within their home and family life was more emotion based rather than structural. Throughout the copious amounts of research that has been conducted on occupational stress among state and local law enforcement, there was a commonality that emotions are at times difficult to regulate, particularly negative emotions. Having difficulty in trying to maintain positive interactions with a marital spouse was identified as a precursor to marital distress (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993) which could then result in emotional tension and may lead to separation and possible divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). This can be said for marriages that have either two law enforcement officials or one law enforcement official. One consideration that is overlooked by research is the training that law enforcement officials have to endure, which teaches them how to handle situations, and to make sure they carry themselves with authority. In light of the training that is given, it could be second hand nature for law enforcement to avoid displaying their emotions, express their emotions, or even simply communicate on how their day was (being positive or negative) (Brown & Grover, 1998; Nordlicht, 1979; Roberts & Levenson, 2001).

There are a number of factors that can be the root cause for law enforcement to have estranged relationships with family. The cause for stress is not always the same for each law enforcement official. It is often forgotten that law enforcement officials have lives of their own because their jobs are defined by their public service (Kerley, 2005). The secondary effects of stress have an equal impact, if not greater, on a spouse and parent-children relationships (Kerley, 2005). Rotating shift work is an issue for some law enforcement because it takes away time from family and children, at times during important events or holidays. The dangers of police work can cause worry and concern from family and friends of officers. This has the ability to hinder

the officer from doing their job to their full potential without having to be preoccupied with the feelings of loved ones at home or restricts them from fully revealing to their significant other what they experience at work. Another example would be the harsh and traumatic events that officers have to endure during their job. Such events are hard to clear from memory because they are viewed as part of the job. For some officers, everyday events can make it difficult to have fulfilling and open family relations (Kappeler, V., Blumber, M., & Potter, G., 2000; Terry, 1981; Violanti & Aron, 1994; Kerley, 2005).

Having further examined these articles, the noticeable gap in law enforcement research seems to remain the same in how workplace stressors are evaluated in state and local but not at the federal level. The purpose of this research project is to help identify the possible sources of workplace stress for federal law enforcement officers and the impact it has on the officer with the potential of establishing a policy that can be used in federal law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement is an important career in which the nature of the job presents several dangers. Being able to pinpoint potential stressors may help law enforcement ease tension, if any, that they may have on the job. By alleviating such stress, it has the potential of creating healthier work environments as well as establishing well-rounded relationships outside of work. To understand the lived experiences of federal law enforcement officers and how job stressors may impact their work and personal lives we rely on in-depth interviews with active federal officers. This qualitative approach is advantageous over quantitative ones in that our goal is to explore how officers identify stressors, are impacted by those stressors, and cope with them. Current studies on law enforcement experiences with possible work-place stressors have focused almost entirely on state and local officers, while neglecting federal officers. Although there is minimal research that has been conducted in this area, it is important to study how working in a demanding

occupation at the federal level impacts participants, both in their professional and personal lives. By examining the participants, it can be determined if they share similar experiences with local and state law enforcement or have a unique experience. Furthermore, results from this study can help produce policies on implementing mental health services within federal agencies. By offering these services, it can ensure that the mental health of their employees can be litigated by a method of release for both their work and home life. Federal law enforcement is an occupation that can be grueling yet gratifying. Protecting society from dangerous criminals sometimes calls for extreme measures and is not always appreciated, as seen in recent news. However, as in most careers, there comes a time when constant routine defers from original thinking. By further examining this current concern, society and its citizens will be able to have a better understanding about the daily encounters federal law enforcement experience.

### **Data and Methods**

Participants for this study were recruited on a voluntary basis through the use of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a common technique used in qualitative research studies when researchers are able to identify only a small number of members of the target population, but then recruit others from those initial participants (Babbie, 2015). All participants interviewed for this study were employed by a single federal law enforcement agency, and were recruited from three different field offices in the Southwestern United States. During the solicitation of volunteers, officers were given a general overview of the topics to be addressed in the interview. Upon hearing the overview, interested participants exchanged telephone numbers with the principal investigator so that later they could set exact times and locations for the interviews and could refer other officers that might participate in the study.



A total of 20 federal law enforcement officers volunteered to be interviewed. Nearly all of the in-depth interviews took place in a conference room at the officer's field office. To guard against potential concerns with confidentiality, the conference rooms selected were intentionally as far as possible from the offices of peers and upper management. Two participants were unable to meet at their office, but agreed to meet at a public location with the principal investigator.

Participants were given a consent form just before each interview, which was approved by the university's institutional review board. The consent form detailed information about the purpose and logistics of the study. Participants were also informed that the interviews and their identities would be kept fully confidential. No financial or other incentives were offered to participants. To ensure confidentiality, aliases were given to all respondents. With permission from each participant, the interviews were audio recorded in digital format. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were thanked for their time and asked by the principal investigator to keep all information from the interview confidential. This was done to ensure organic answers from all participants, especially in light of what is known about the tight-knit culture of law enforcement, often called the "Blue Line" of policing (Skolnick & Bayley, 1988). The interviews were conducted over a four-month period in 2016, and ranged from about 30 to 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed for common themes. As additional layers of confidentiality, identifying information from the audio interviews was not included in the final transcripts, and all digital files were deleted after final transcription.

In terms of interview content, participants were asked an array of questions from a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A). First, participants were asked about their pathways and motivations into law enforcement. Second, participants were asked about stressors encountered in their work that may negatively impact their family and social lives. Third,

participants were asked about the professional, physiological, and psychological impacts of those stressors. Fourth, participants were asked about methods (if any) used to cope with the stressors of their work.

Basic demographic and work information for the 20 federal law enforcement officers interviewed is included in Table 1. In addition to the federal law enforcement experience that made them eligible for this study, all but one interviewee had extensive experience in state or local law enforcement. Participants included 17 men (85%) and 3 women (15%). The average age of participants was 39.7 years and ranged from 27 to 51 years. For racial and ethnic composition, participants identified as White/Non-Hispanic (50%), Black (20%), White/Hispanic (20%), and Hispanic (10%). In terms of educational attainment, 60% of participants completed at least an undergraduate degree, and 20% completed a graduate degree. In terms of family life, 65% of participants were married, 20% unmarried (single/never married or divorced), and 15% engaged. Number of children for participants ranged from 0 to 4, with an average of 1.75.

### ***Coding Methods***

All twenty interviews were individually recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for common themes. In order to ensure interrater reliability, each transcript was read individually by each of the three investigators to identify how the participants defined stress, impacts of stress, and coping mechanisms. After viewing the interviews individually, the investigators then met to analyze and create major themes and subthemes that were most commonly talked about within the transcripts (see Table 3). Each major theme and subtheme was created on the basis of the interview and the experiences each participant shared with the main investigator.

**Table 1. Demographic and Work History Information for Study Participants**

#	Alias	Years in LE	Years in Fed LE	Year born	Age	Gender	Race	Education	Marital Status	# of children
1	Albert	20.00	20.00	1971	45	M	White/NonHispanic	Finished undergraduate degree	Single	2
2	Beatrice	9.00	9.00	1985	31	F	White/Hispanic	Finished undergraduate degree	Engaged	0
3	Calvin	5.50	5.50	1989	27	M	White/Hispanic	Finished undergraduate degree	Engaged	0
4	Dean	10.00	10.00	1982	34	M	White/Hispanic	High School	Married	2
5	Eve	19.00	19.00	1968	48	F	White/NonHispanic	Graduate	Married	4
6	Frank	5.00	5.00	1988	28	M	White/NonHispanic	Finished undergraduate degree	Engaged	0
7	George	19.00	14.00	1973	43	M	Black	Some undergraduate college	Single	0
8	Harry	21.00	21.00	1971	45	M	White/NonHispanic	Finished graduate degree	Married	3
9	Isabelle	10.00	6.00	1980	36	F	White/NonHispanic	Finished graduate degree	Single	0
10	Jason	9.00	9.00	1979	37	M	White/NonHispanic	Some undergraduate college	Married	3
11	Kanye	11.00	6.00	1983	33	M	White/NonHispanic	Finished graduate degree	Married	0
12	Luis	14.00	20.00	1976	40	M	Black	Finished graduate degree	Married	2
13	Matthew	20.00	20.00	1968	48	M	Black	Some undergraduate college	Married	2
14	Nathan	14.00	10.00	1978	38	M	White/Hispanic	Some graduate classes	Married	1
15	Oliver	14.00	14.00	1978	38	M	White/NonHispanic	Some undergraduate college	Married	4
16	Patrick	23.00	16.00	1974	42	M	White/NonHispanic	High School	Single	1
17	Quincy	20.00	20.00	1969	47	M	White/NonHispanic	Graduate High School	Married	3
18	Roger	22.00	9.00	1971	45	M	Hispanic	Some undergraduate college	Married	4
19	Samson	0.00	25.00	1965	51	M	Black	Finished undergraduate degree	Married	3
20	Trevor	14.00	14.00	1979	37	M	Hispanic	Finished undergraduate degree	Married	1

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics**

	Years in LE	Years Fed LE	Age	# Child
Mean	13.98	13.63	39.7	1.75
Median	14	14	39	2
Mode	14	20	48	0

**Table 3. Major Themes**

Major Themes	Sub-themes
Stressors of Law Enforcement	Unpredictability, monotony, organizational challenges, negative media and public perception
Impacts of Stressors	Psychological effects
Coping	Compartmentalization, focusing attention on others as a distraction

## Results

### *Stressors of Law Enforcement*

Regardless of the job, everybody experiences stress at some point when they go to work. For some, it might be meeting a deadline for a certain project or rushing to turn in their quarterly report. For the participants in this research study, their experiences with stress were more intense and often times involved being in dangerous scenarios that put their life at risk. After being asked about their pathways into law enforcement, the participants shared the stressful aspect of their job starting with the dangerous aspect.

Dangerous, I mean, every day actually. But...but...before um...okay let's go back from the beginning. Working in Arizona, being around the type of people we were around in court, in cell block. I used to have cell block duty meaning processing these prisoners. Uh...it was danger every day. Any moment, somebody could snap my neck, pull me in, stomp me down, do whatever. Uh...transporting the prisoners is dangerous every day, every time that happens. Because you don't know who wants to break these people out. And the lengths that they would go to to break a person out from shooting them, crashing my vehicle, whatever. Um...working warrants, every day. Every day going after a warrant person presents danger because you never know what you're going into. Uh...you may have a name, the address of a person, you don't know what their mindset is. You don't know...so it was stressful and dangerous every day (Luis, 20 years in federal law enforcement).

In a recent study by Newman and Rucker-Reed (2004), their findings indicated that police work was a more stressful job than most occupations. The stress from police work can be caused by the repeated interactions with violent people, exposure to violent situations, being assaulted with weapons, and even the likelihood of being killed (Dempsey, 1994. Fell, Richard, & Wallace , 1980; Lawrence, 1984; Reiser & Geiger, 1984; Swanson et al., 1998). Being constantly exposed to such danger can also train a person to be on such high alert, even when they are not on the clock. Some of the participants were always at such high alert while, others found their job instilled a heightened sense of awareness and decision-making.

You know and so on some I can see why, if you would tell somebody 5 times to get their hands out of their waist...and they're not doing it, you know and then they start making a move...it looks like a gun? Yeah, I'm gonna shoot. And like if someone puts a gun to

their head to make it look like they're gonna kill themselves, I'm gonna shoot them too. Because it only takes a fraction of a second to go like that. To point that gun at you. So...like I said, my main priority are my partners and then me. So um...I don't know. It's just a lot of things I believed when I was younger, in college and before I got into this position, I don't believe now. You know, there's two sides to every story (Isabelle, 6 years in federal law enforcement).

Besides danger being a main component of stress, many of the participants discussed how organizational challenges were more stressful than the danger they encounter on the job. Howes and Goodman Delahunty (2014) conducted a study on Australian police officers to gain a better understanding of what makes them enter, stay, and leave law enforcement. Issues in policing was a main theme as to why Australian police officers were deciding to leave their careers. Such issues seemed to have caused more stress as opposed to being out in the field. Some of the issues that were found with the officers were their lack of enjoyment of the job, cronyism, workload, lack of respect from the community, and lack of support from management (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014). A similar theme was prevalent in the current study.

Or things like that. You know, and you know having been put in that situation um...think that's the worst. Is where um...you don't feel like your job is gonna back you up on anything that you did. Even though they told you to do it. Um...where as if you know, you did...you did everything that you thought you could do or to the best of your ability. And they're telling you, 'Hey, it'll be fine. It'll be fine.'. And then when things come down they're like, 'Oh, well this is what happened.'. And they're like, 'Well I thought you said you were gonna back me up?'. And they're like, 'Oh, no no no. Don't worry.'.

You know, it's fine but then it's like you're reading and it's like you basically put all the fault on me (Beatrice, 9 years in federal law enforcement).

During the current study, I found that more participants mentioned dealing with management as a common stressor opposed to being out in the field. Being a high intensity job, it could potentially lead a law enforcement official to job burnout or workplace dissatisfaction (Lai, Tzeng, & Peng, 2013). Due to the nature of the job and being constantly under the eye of public scrutiny, management is an important task.

And I remember...I remember after the month ended and I remember looking at the stats and everybody else had like 2 or 3 arrests. And I was like 20 or 18 people that I arrested and I was like, 'That's pretty bad ass. I got all these people.'. And I remember the comments coming from those people. Like the supervisors and the high ups and it was kinda like...one of them was like, 'Hey I heard you arrested a couple people.'. Like oh, big fucking deal. The other one said...I remember one of them saying, 'Yeah, but how many of those cases are actually good cases, complex hard cases. No one cares.'. And it was kinda like, I did all that work, I did all this stuff... (Patrick, 16 years in federal law enforcement).

Alongside the stressors of management, a lack of respect among the community and media is something that the participants mentioned when discussing their stressors. One participant had mentioned that he felt his family would have shared the same pro-blue attitude he had but that was not the case.

I thought my family sort of shared the same pro-blue attitude. And through their experiences, they have developed this um...belief that at least locally that the police officers are not trained to the level they should be. And so as a result, they dealt poorly

with the community. And so I got to hear a couple different examples of that from my family. But then I...I I'm like guys, 'You gotta see this from our side. What you're explaining because he pulled a gun or he un-holstered his gun in this particular situation 'cuz you wouldn't stop in this area and you drove to a wooded area, I would've done the same thing. This cop was in the right.' And so basically just that whole experience of knowing...man, this guys don't look at things the same thing we do. And they shouldn't have to. You know...yeah. They don't have the same training and so forth. But that experience sort of um...have sort of changed my thinking in a way because now it's almost enlightening. Like man, like...I sort of surround myself with this pro-law enforcement community and I think everybody sort of believes the same things I do and thinks the same way. And there are these few people that don't. When in reality I think I'm learning more that there are so many people that just don't like cops and my family, with the exception of me, they really don't care for cops (Jason, 9 years in federal law enforcement).

With today's society and current media, law enforcement does not get portrayed in the best light often. Law enforcement is usually a private occupation that is hidden from the outside until chaos breaks (Garcia, 2008).

Um, right now with social media uh...everyone having a camera. I don't think that's bad cuz I conduct myself in a professional manner. However, people don't always capture the entire story when things are published out of context now. Um...I think that's a risk in just being a police officer now, there's a lot of liability um...involved. Um...and I think police officers, with that liability, still say, 'No matter what, no matter how many people



are gonna film me or judge me, I'm still gonna do my job and do it professional.'

(Samson, 25 years in federal law enforcement).

Among law enforcement, there is a lack of uniformity that can be associated with the concept of stress (Patterson, 1992). Among the participants, unpredictability in their job seemed to cause occupational stressors. However, even though unpredictability seemed to be a large part of the job and was identified as a stressor, it was also identified as a source of excitement and part of the allure of the occupation.

So our job is unique in so many ways but um...so you have your colors that we refer to; green, yellow, red. And green being everything's good and you're calm. And then yellow, you're in state of awareness. And uh...and red, you're like your juices are going. You're going through a door. So I could be in court right now at 1 o'clock, 1:30 in Judge X and then I get a text, 'Hey, as soon as you're done with court, we got a fresh new homicide warrant.'. So within 45 minutes from going in a door and conducting a uh...everything that goes along with that. And then I have a 3 o'clock court. And I gotta head right back, change over again, still sweatin, gotta slow the heart rate. Think about everything I need to do for the prisoners, do all my checks and everything and then get into court. So there's this really abrupt sort of transition that you have to go through and I think it's probably more stressful on our bodies than we realize (Jason, 9 years in federal law enforcement).

I never know what I'm gonna be doing. Um...I could be like today, I was planning on going out and running some warrants. But then got called into court for 2 o'clock. So I was able to get some warrant work done this morning but then...I had to drop some stuff. Reprioritize and come to court and take care of other things. So just...the flexibility of

the job. The not knowing what you're gonna be doing (Frank, 5 years in federal law enforcement).

Although unpredictability was identified as a stressor, yet doubled as a source of excitement for most of the participants, monotony of their job was consistently identified as a stressor and the largest contribution to workplace burnout. Schaufeli and Peeters (2000) described burnout as a loss of energy and idealism because of the conditions in a person's work (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980). Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) described burnout in four stages: 1) enthusiasm, 2) stagnation, 3) frustration, and 4) apathy. While coding the transcripts, similar stages of burnout was apparent among the respondents in this study when discussing their paperwork and court duties. There was a constant inner battle between them of enjoying the safety of the monotony but hating the lack of excitement.

Typical stressor is having...when you're out there working a big case and you're you know, you have to call the supervisor and say, 'Hey, this is what's going on'. And having them tell you, 'Well did you fill out all the paperwork?'. And the paperwork part of it is hard. Make sure we get it in the system so in case something does happen. Headquarters knows it was our case and we were working it. Um...so they have more information on it but the briefings and getting everybody there and that's...that's the most stress of the whole...and I mean when you have a case and some of it of you have a new team member of you have the locals come and help. You have you have to worry about them. You need to focus just on the mission but um...the paperwork part of it. And debriefs and the reports afterwards (Eve, 19 years in federal law enforcement).

One participant had made light of their monotonous work earlier in an interview but retracted later to note that there are some serious risks that may occur among the monotony of

fulfilling court duties. Serious risks such as, stabbings, prisoner hostility, and fights, that does not readily come to mind when discussing court duties as it is a possibility but not a common occurrence. Along with this one participant, there were other participants that liked the safety of having court duty but dreaded the lack of excitement.

You don't know what's gonna happen one moment to the next. Even sitting in here, even going to court. Even though I made light of going to court, you don't ever know what's gonna happen 'cause what...what a couple months ago? In the trial, a deputy shot someone in trial. He actually shot the uh...the defendant, 'cuz he got up to attack a witness. Yeah (Matthew, 20 years in federal law enforcement).

When asked about any psychological effects that the participants may have noticed or experienced throughout their law enforcement career, almost every single one teetered around, or described, characteristics of cynicism. Some described it as paranoid, others as overly cautious. However, in the end, they almost all mentioned that they did not like to categorize themselves in that manner.

I think that's in general, all law enforcement guys. In general, I think that's the case. Um...I've even seen it with my wife. I've opened her eyes so she sees more than the average person as well so, so yeah. Just being in this job you, you see all the dangers. You don't put your guard down. I wear my gun at church, you know? Like you said, everywhere I go, that I can, I usually carry a fire arm just in case. I don't wanna be caught out there, not that I'm trying to enforce things but I don't wanna be put in a situation where I could've done something but, you know. Obviously there's ways of doing that to where you don't endanger yourself more. 'Cuz you're not out there with at least handcuffs and everything else that you carry when you normally work but, you know.

Um...you're just more aware of your environment. Something as simple as...from being a police officer and taking a lot of reports, I'm very leery about getting my car broken into all the time. Especially a government car where you carry laptop, guns, and equipment and what not. So, just parking at a restaurant for lunch time or even to go on something, you know there's always that fear that's somebody's gonna break into it or steal it and take all of that stuff with 'em. So, you know, pretty paranoid I guess.

About stuff like that so you know, you see the bad things...seen you know certain tattoos on people's arms or whatever. You start thinking, 'Okay, what gang is that guy from?' (Nathan, 10 years in federal law enforcement).

Per Finney and colleagues (2013), psychological distress has been shown to increase long term job stress and burnout among employees. "Psychological syndrome" is a term used to describe when the demands of an employee and their ability to cope do not match up. One characteristic of this syndrome is cynicism (Finney, et al., 2013).

Well...for the most part, I'm pretty optimistic. So I would say that that attitude has not changed. Um...however, I don't wanna sound paranoid but I'm not likely to trust people as often because of some of the people we've come in con...in contact with throughout our careers or through my career. You know, it's harder to trust people, in general.

Um...so I mean I would say I've changed in that regard. You know, when I go out somewhere, I'll look for 'what ifs'. You have a lot of 'what ifs' wherever you go somewhere (Calvin, 5.5 years in federal law enforcement).

Mitchell et al. (2000) discussed the term "job embeddedness" to explain 3 categories of a person's job; social, personal, and economic. Johnson, Sachau, and Englert (2010) changed the terms to links, fit, and sacrifice. These terms were used to describe an employee's inability to

compartmentalize their work and social life along with the sacrifices they might have to unwillingly make if they were to leave their job (Johnson, et al., 2010).

The hindrance is finding that balance and time off. Um...so I know that I need to see family at some point. They need to have me around, whether they're capable of running 3 weeks or 4 weeks without me, yes. They do it all the time. Um...especially before I came to this area, I'd be gone for 3 weeks at a time. I would get home and be home for less than 12 hours and be gone for 3 weeks again. Um...and they were always worried about me but it kinda hit home too, one point. Like, 'Oh, dad. You're home?'. And that hurt. Um...but you know, it's a hindrance but that's my biggest weakness and I've told every boss and everybody that I work with that you...and I'm a hypocrite. I'm a total hypocrite but I tell them that you have to find that balance. You have to be able to cut it off at some point. Um...because if not, if you keep immersing yourself and at that pace and that speed, burnout comes faster and more often and your work product goes down. So I need people to be energized and you know, hard working. But at the same time, I'm still driving to the 51% of the mission accomplishment. Um...so I feel that I need to be there and I feel that my people need to be there so it's really tough. I wouldn't call it as much as a hindrance as it's a um...it's kind of a...at times it's an impediment to getting the job done. Maybe. Um...but it shouldn't be and if I'm talking about long term perspective or eternal perspective, nothing's more important than family. Nothing's more important than our future. Um...and that's not, you know, me anymore. But that's, you know, the youngsters. So um...you have to find the time and the balance and you have to figure out responsibilities and priorities and not cut the ones that are the most important. So I'm trying to do a better job (Oliver, 14 years in federal law enforcement).

During an interview, one participant mentioned that he sees his home and work life as two different jobs. By doing so, this was a way he could compartmentalize and attend to his wife's needs without having to worry about work.

Uh... 'cuz, ha. Um...you know I gotta pay attention to what my wife wants to do.

Whether she...I just can't shut off. Like, 'Hey I'm tired. I don't wanna do anything.'

You know? Um...so like I take that as another job or responsibility that you gotta go home and forget about what happened over here. Just, you know, kinda like talk about it for a little bit and then focus on what she's talking about or what she wants to do (Dean, 10 years in federal law enforcement).

A study conducted by Violanti and Marshall (1983) assessed a wide variety of stressors and coping strategies among officers. It was concluded that the officers had behavioral responses due to the pressure of their police work which made them deviant/and or cynical (Violanti & Marshall, 1983; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004).

You know I was working a lot. I think that...that (inaudible) do that, you're not gonna be, you know in a relationship with somebody. As soon as I had my daughter, it kinda changed. Um...I wanted to spend time with her and do things with her, those type of things. So, it did change. But I would say those type of things probably did add up to why I was divorced. I mean, that's not to say it was the only thing...it was just one of the things (Patrick, 16 years in federal law enforcement).

In 2003 Patterson studied officers on both their adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. The adaptive coping strategies included religion, family, and support from fellow officers. Focusing on family as a coping strategy can reduce stress and buffer any stress that is carried into their home life (Spina, 2006).

Uh...well, I mean...family and God. You know, that's what I lean to. I mean, I'm a man of faith and I just...I uh...I find comfort in that. And just spending time with my family and friends. Disconnecting from the job. I uh...I had these...I consider my colleagues friends and stuff. But uh...most of the people I hang out with have nothing to do with law enforcement because when I stopped working, I wanted to just disconnect from it. I don't wanna continue talking about work. I just want to talk about sports, hobbies, you know, movies. Anything, you know, other than work (Trevor, 14 years in federal law enforcement).

### *Events shared by the participants*

Throughout the interviews, participants shared events and stories that were cohesive or a precursor to their occupational stress. The following quote shares an experience from the participant's earlier days in his career. This experience shed some light on the dangers and value of life on this job.

Um...early in my career uh...there was a deputy that was traveling and uh...he um...fell asleep on the road and died. Crashed and died. And he was pass – or his parents lived in the city where I was first stationed at. And uh...a senior deputy, you know, very experienced guy, you know, was tasked with uh...going to notify his family that he had passed. And uh...I um...I went with he...he told me, 'You're coming with me.' He didn't even ask me, he just told me, 'You're coming with me. This is a very valuable lesson.' So I did and we went and just the fact that I mean, he you know, he was telling me, you know, it's not all about, you know, shootings and this and that. I say he's like it's uh...you know, life happens and one moment you're here and one moment you're not.

And and then this job, there's just more than what the average person goes through. So, you know, I really took a...I really learned from that experience that, 'Hey. You know, I mean, don't take anything for granted.'. You know, I mean, it's...this is real. You know. Um...people die and people are gonna die around you. You know, in this job so...you know. Be prepared, you know, because it's gonna happen (Trevor, 14 years in federal law enforcement).

The following participant describes an event where he lost a fellow coworker and it influenced how he approaches his work. Even when everything is done according to protocol, there is always the possibility that something can go off track and cause mayhem.

Well, yeah. I would say just...it was more a realization that...I don't wanna say I wasn't invincible. That's pretty cliché but just uh...realization that you can do everything right and things can still go wrong. So it's uh...I mean that's something that's completely out of your control. We also had uh...a shooting involving a XXX in XXX. Um...I think he was in XXX but he was out of XXX. Or something like that. Or XXX. Uh...XXX. He was going up to a house and uh...everything was done right. The team brief, everything. And got killed. Shot in the back of the head because somebody was hiding, you know, behind a door. Whatever the situation was. You know, uh...stuff like that just makes you realize that anything you do that right, there's always a chance that...Murphy's Law; you know, what can go wrong will go wrong. So uh...you just gotta be that much more prepared. Or... (Frank, 5 years in federal law enforcement).

The following entry describes how the participant became adamant on a shooting case due to circumstances that the victim was in. Knowing the circumstance that the victim's family was in encouraged the participant to look for the shooter until justice was served.



Um...I experienced that in a case where, not to go into details of the case, but the...there's a widow whose husband was killed while covering up their 5 year old. Um...he was shot to death. He literally bled out on top of the child. When I got involved in the homicide and the mayhem cases for this fugitive um...I was working it aggressively just like I would any other case and the homicide detective was was...he was critical but he was also calculated. He knew what he was doing. He called me one day to give me some information. He actually had the widow there and he handed the phone over to the widow and so she talked about the case, once we got off the phone, I was balling. And I felt for her um...but it was also, and why the homicide detective did it, it was also instrumental and motivating me. And so I became more aggressive working the case, pulling out all the stops. It took me several years to get him back. He had fled internationally. I traveled internationally several times. Um...lots of incidents happen internationally. They were scary to the point where I was questioning what am I doing. And then eventually I had the guy arrested by our personnel over in that other country. And uh...I got confirmation that he was coming back so I got to make a phone call back to the homicide detective...I told him. He gave me the phone number for the widow. I called her and talked to her and that was exactly what I was saying. Providing closure so what I was able to do for her and her son, who's still extremely traumatized from the incident, was to give them some peace back. At least they know the person that did this was going to be able to now face punishment. Which he's doing life without parole now. So it was good. We got a killer off the street and I think that her comments and her uh...support and love for us and the job that we do, that was a huge like motivating factor for me to kind of push into the next case (Oliver, 14 years in federal law enforcement).

One participant shared his frustrations on how outsiders (lawyers, politicians, etc.) constantly criticize federal law enforcement about how they conduct their job.

Uh...everybody's mad at you all the time and it's like um...you feel like that don't work...that aren't involved in that line of work or constantly criticizing what you do. And it's like um...I have to...I've gone out. I've like...when I worked in South XXX, I'd go out there every single day. And you answer thousands of calls over years and you're involved in thousands of arrests. Maybe a thousand...maybe less. But a lot of arrests. You're involved in all this stuff and then you could do something that's kind of half way a mistake and you have to listen to all these lawyers and politicians and anybody discuss how they would've done – people that never worked in this field before and it just...it's...the most bizarre thing to me. That that happens! All these lawyers are like, 'Well I think that we should go like...'. People have never done the job and know nothing about it (Kanye, 6 years in federal law enforcement).

## **Discussion**

The current study investigated federal law enforcement officials to determine what might be the underlying cause of occupational stress and if prevalent, the impact it had on the officers' work and personal lives. The investigation was done through intensive qualitative interviews that observed their mindset from the beginning of their career to present day. Despite the risky nature of the federal law enforcement profession, the 20 participants most often highlighted occupational stress as the foremost stressor at work. As a reminder, occupational stress is defined as organizational challenges, negative media and public perception, the unpredictability and monotony of work, psychological effects, compartmentalization, and focusing their attention

elsewhere when stressed. The participants recalled situations in grave detail to expose their individual cause of stress.

Looking back on the coping mechanisms of the participants, it was noted that some of the participants had their own personal sense of humor while at work. In such an emotionally demanding job, a different sense of humor was mentioned as a coping mechanism in order to keep a “macho” façade during tough times as well as a way to disassociate from impactful events that occur on the job. Many participants also mentioned that their outlook on the world is different than when they first started their federal job. Their views of the world changed after they saw a horrific incident with a child or witnessed a death of a teammate. Some participants described it as being realistic or cynical. From the outside looking in, it may seem that federal law enforcement officials are bleak and numb. Per the interviews, which provide a more introspective view, this attitude is maintained in order to compartmentalize and detach from the situation to complete the job successfully. During the interviews, it seemed as if the participants were saying what they thought they should be saying versus how they really feel in their career. Although the interviews were confidential and in a secluded area, I was still under the impression that the participants felt guarded. Having done 80% of the interviews in a secluded area at the participants’ place of work may have contributed to their sense of defense. Being in the same building may have also given participants the impression that they were under the agency’s watchful eye. The 20% of the participants that I interviewed outside of their office were more willing to open up about their occupational stressors and the causes behind them. Federal law enforcement officers feel safer talking to their fellow peers about work related stress due to the tight-knit culture that they share. This is called a “Blue Line” of policing (Sklnick & Bayley, 1988). Federal law enforcement officials also attributed a large portion of their stress from

management, office politics, and monotony—which may be difficult topics to share with “outsiders”.

Overall, the federal law enforcement officials described their jobs with such vast admiration but were often times bored with the monotony of office tasks including paperwork and attending court. Some of the participants mentioned that being family-oriented could also cause some added stress due to the constant unpredictability of their daily schedules. There were some participants that described going home to their family as synonymous with having a second job. The results of this study supported that what the federal law enforcement officials experience during their time in the field/office, number of traumatic events, and trying to maintain relationships all factors into their occupational stress—whether or not they consciously identify it as such. It can be concluded that there are personalized patterns of occupational stress among federal law enforcement officials.

### *Female Officers*

While not the focus of this current study, the occupational stress experienced among the men was largely similar to the women. One exception was a common theme discussed by all female federal officers who discussed tactics to make themselves feel and appear equal to their male counterparts. All three of the women described experiences of sexism (while not labeling it as such) in the office and the need to prove themselves competent of being able to work with men. When asked what makes being in federal law enforcement more difficult for them, all three women had different answers but it all tied in with the need to prove themselves to be just as capable as their male colleagues and in some regards, to make themselves fit in as “one of the guys.” Beatrice spoke about how women are seen as incompetent or as office objects by their

peers, men. Beatrice also spoke about how some women get involved in romantic relationships with other fellow federal law enforcement officials. While discussing this, Beatrice referred to these women as “property” through the eyes of their male peers. When a woman is involved with a male federal law enforcement official, they are no longer considered a female but looked at as being the possession of the male officer.

Eve mentioned the need of her having to gain the trust of the men to feel equal. It was not a matter of her needing to work hard but to prove herself through her work. Eve indicated that the moment her male peers assigned her an important task in the field, she knew that they trusted her enough to be given such a responsibility. Being in a male dominant career, Eve felt that she had done her time by gaining the trust of the men and feeling like an equal. Once passing her initiation, she described feeling as if she belonged in the tight-knit group and no longer had to prove herself. Isabelle provided more scenarios of sexism that she has experienced in the workplace. Isabelle explained that when people see a female, either a prisoner or someone that they work with, they are perceived as weak and will get walked all over. Isabelle mentions that since women are seen as having a softer side, they are often manipulated as well and targeted because of their gender. Isabelle felt that not only does she need to prove herself but wished that she had gotten into more fights during the beginning of her training. Getting into more fights would show that she can hold her own while disproving the stereotyped “soft” side that a woman should have. All three of these women shared stories of the hardships of being a woman in this male dominating field and how they could set stereotypes to rest. A hyper-focus of proving oneself and being aware of their gender as well as how their co-workers might perceive them was a common theme discussed by all females in this study while males provided no similar scenarios or considerations.

As discussed by Wells (2000), females in law enforcement must earn the respect of not only their peers but of the community as well. Females in law enforcement are not automatically gifted with respect as their male counterparts would be. This is encompassed in what is termed “white male privilege” (Wells, 2000). Wells (2000) concluded that her females participants indicated that they had to prove themselves as police officers in order for the males to see that they are capable of the job. The female officers also suggested that they were tested by the male officers to see if they were cowards, if they could handle the physical duties to perform the job, or even if they could make their environment uncomfortable with harassment in order to push the female officers to quit. Although the female officers were able to prove to the male officers that they can handle the job, they did not always handle it in the manner that the male officers would. Very similar themes were present in the transcripts of the female federal law enforcement officers in this current study.

### ***Limitations***

To date, research in this area has been limited due to the confidentiality of federal law enforcement officials. While this study contributes to the literature in that it is one of the few studies to examine work-place stress for federal law enforcement officials as well as the first qualitative study of this topic, it is not without limitations. In this study, one limitation was the number of participants. Twenty participants is a small sample of federal officers when considering the large amount of active officers nationally. Thus, the results are not representative of all federal agencies due to the method of sample selection and cannot be generalized. However, the sample size is suitable for a qualitative study and having such an in-depth view of federal law enforcement officials is valuable, as few studies of this subject exist. One other

limitation was the gender gap. There were 17 males and 3 females interviewed. As indicated by the current study, it appears that there is an element of occupational stress that is not equal to both genders. Specifically, females indicate a conscious effort to prove themselves as “one of the guys” and capable of being a federal law enforcement officer. While the majority of federal law enforcement officers are male, future studies should attempt to further capture the experiences of female federal officers to determine whether their experiences differ from their male counterparts.

### ***Policy Implications***

Results from this study portray that most of the participants interviewed had conflicts with their coping strategies. For some it was being unable to compartmentalize while for others it was trying to focus their attention on teammates or family. Due to the constant back and forth from family to work that the participants experienced, results from this study can help provide mental health services among federal agencies. These services can help transition a federal law enforcement official after a traumatic or stressful work situation. To ensure that the federal law enforcement officials would be able to obtain the full benefits and keep their visits confidential, a mental health therapist will be made available to an officer at an undisclosed location.

In order to gain the full benefits of this policy, the federal law enforcement officials must feel comfortable. To ensure that comfortableness, the officer can choose their own mental health therapist which would be away from their place of work. By making this mandatory, a change in employee moral will be easier to track which can help management better cater to their officers. One of the biggest complaints from the participants was that management added more stressors

than necessary. By having management take an interest in their employees' personal and mental health, it has the potential of decreasing a potential turnover rate.



Appendix A  
Interview Guide

**“I don’t wanna sound paranoid but I’m not likely to trust people”: Understanding Work and Life Stressors in A Sample of Federal Law Enforcement Officials**

**Recruitment Speech:**

My name is Stephanie Sanford and I am a graduate student from the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). I would like to invite you to participate in a study that will help us understand your life experiences and decision making processes as a federal official.

As a federal law enforcement official, you will be asked to answer questions about your background, life experiences, and work experiences. Your participation will involve an interview with us that will take approximately 45-60 minutes. Participation is voluntary, and all interviews will be completely confidential. If you would like to participate in this research study, we can start the interview now or set up a date and time in the near future to talk with you.

**BACKGROUND**

- Please tell me about how you first became interested in law enforcement?
- What were the earliest influences about law enforcement?
  - From family
  - Friends
  - T.V. and movies
- When did you know you wanted to be in law enforcement?
- What are some events that led you to this career?
- What are some of the top reasons that you wanted to be in law enforcement?
- What would you say were your main goals for law enforcement career?

**FIRST LAW ENFORCEMENT JOB**

- Tell me about your first-full time law enforcement job?
  - Position
  - Responsibilities
- What things did you like best about that job?
- What things did you like the least about that job?
- Tell me how you dealt with those things that you did not like?
- What kinds of changes did you notice in your approach and attitude over time?
- What were your experiences with burnout?

**FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT JOB (Current)**

- Tell me about how you came to this current job?
- Tell me the things you like best about this job?
- Tell me the things you like least about this job?
- How do you deal with some of the negative things?
- What are some of the most unexpected parts of this job?

**• EXPERIENCES AND COPING IN LAW ENFORCEMENT**

- Earlier we talked about your attitudes when you first started law enforcement. Now that you've been in the field for a while, how have your perceptions changed?
  - Did changes happen gradually or did certain events quickly change your perceptions?
  - Tell me about a certain event that has changed your views about law enforcement.
- Tell me about the risks associated with your job. How often are you in dangerous situations?
  - Describe one or more incidents.
  - What precautions did you take?
  - How do dangerous situations affect you?
  - Mostly emotional or physical effects? Please explain.
- Tell me about the typical stressors for you.
  - What is the most stressful part of your job?
  - Least stressful part?
  - What is a typical day like for you?
- Tell me about a really stressful event that changed how you approach your job.
  - Changed your techniques?
  - Changed how you interact with others?
- How do you de-stress or relax after work?
  - How effective are those activities?
- Sometimes stress on the job can create challenges in family life.
- What are some of the challenges for you in balancing work and family life?
- Tell me about your interactions with family after a bad day at work?
  - How about a good day?
    - How much detail do you share?
    - How much do you share about good days versus bad days?
- How often has family life been a hindrance for you in doing your job?
- What are the challenges of being in a relationship?
  - Challenges of being a father/mother
- What are some of the things you have had to give up because of your job?
- Tell me about a time when you had to tell your supervisor you could not do something because of family life?
- How challenging is it to be involved in your children's life?
- What are your best strategies for work-family balance?

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

- Year born
- Race
- Gender
- Education

Thank you for participating and allowing me to speak with you today. Everything that we have discussed today will be kept confidential.

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### **Biological Information**

I received my Bachelor's in Psychology at The University of Texas at Austin and will be receiving my Master's in Criminology and Criminal Justice. My future plans are to either join a federal agency and pursue a career in law enforcement or continue my interest in CRCJ research through academia.