

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL

**OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND WORK ENGAGEMENT OF DOG UNIT
MEMBERS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

by

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Declaration

Short dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Social Science (Industrial Psychology) at the School of Applied Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I hereby declare that this short dissertation, “*Occupational stress and work engagement of Dog Unit Member’s in the South African Police Service: A qualitative study*”, is my own original work, and that it has not previously in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university for a degree. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and duly acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Abstract

Police officers have a significant role to play in the stability, economic growth, and development of South Africa. Therefore, it is critical for the South African Police Service (SAPS) to have police officers who are engaged in their work. However, given the high levels of crime and violence in South Africa, and the ensuing dangers associated with police work, many of these situations are experienced as stressful, often resulting in psychological distress. On the contrary, some police officers, regardless of the stressful nature of their job, seem to enjoy their work and exert greater effort in dealing with these stressors.

The purpose of this study was to provide a qualitative description of occupational stress and work engagement as perceived and experienced by police officers in the SAPS Dog Unit.

The researcher's interest in this research topic, emanated when, as part of a Psychometry Internship at the SAPS, the researcher was involved in psychometric evaluation of police officers who wanted to join the Dog Unit. The researcher had the opportunity to interview police officers who acknowledged that, despite being aware of the stressful nature of the job, they were willing to deal with these stressors. Furthermore, a comprehensive search of literature revealed that there are no qualitative studies exploring perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement of police officers in the Dog Unit. This motivated the researcher to conduct this study to fill in the gap of qualitative research literature.

A qualitative research design was used and the transactional approach to stress formed the theoretical premise of this study. A purposive non-probability sampling technique resulted in

10 interviews being conducted with both male and female dog handlers at the SAPS Dog Unit in Durban. The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview schedule and all audio-taped interview data was analysed using thematic content analysis.

The findings of the study suggest that individual differences and situational factors are useful in explaining how stressors produced different reactions in police officers at the Dog Unit based on their cognitive appraisal of work demands. The most common sources of occupational stress experienced by participants include: (a) task related stressors, (b) organisational stressors, and (c) personal stressors. With regard to these stressors, the results suggest that organisational stressors greatly affect participants compared to task-related stressors. With regard to perceptions and experiences of work engagement, the results reveal that perceptions of work engagement spanned over six domains: (a) inner calling, (b) an active choice to become a police officer, (c) to serve and protect, (d) sense of duty, (e) recognition, and (f) to form an identity. Interestingly it was found that the following resources positively influenced work engagement, namely, social support, skills and abilities, peer support, and self-efficacy. In addition, findings suggest that positive appraisals of work situations and being immersed in one's job significantly influenced participant's experiences of work engagement. Thus, the findings suggest that adequate resources and positive appraisals can promote engagement even when the conditions for engagement are less than optimal.

This study contributes greatly to the evolving body of knowledge on occupational stress and work engagement and provides a unique context specific perspective to understanding how police officers in the Dog Unit perceive and experience occupational stress and work engagement. Prior to the present study, no studies had been undertaken to specifically understand perceptions and experiences of police officers in the Dog Unit.

It has become clear that further research in this regard is required to bring about a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement of police officers in the Dog Unit. The objective being to provide more support to police officers to ensure the stability, economic growth, and development of South Africa.

In contrast to studies which show that high job demands and lack of job resources negatively impact employee engagement, findings from this study show that despite being exposed to conditions that are less favourable for engagement, police officers at the Dog Unit are engaged. An understanding of police officer's perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement may provide direction for strategies to provide more support to dog handlers and improve work engagement in the Dog Unit.

Keywords: Occupational stress, work engagement, transactional theory, thematic content analysis, qualitative research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide the background to and rationale for conducting this particular research study. In this chapter the problem statement is discussed. The research aims and objective is also presented. Thereafter, the research method and research design relevant to the research is presented. Finally, the research chapter concludes with a structure of the dissertation.

1.2 Background

Policing has been widely described as one of society's most innately stressful occupations (Anshel, 2000; Lord, Gray, & Pond, 1991). This is particularly true for police officers in South Africa, where significant transformation of the SAPS, the dissolution of the apartheid regime, and the socio-economic and political turmoil of the past three decades has generated a demanding context in which police officers function (Gulle, Tredoux, & Foster, 1998; Mostert, Cronje, & Pienaar, 2006; Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006). Moreover, the unpredictable nature of police work and the evolving role of police officers create new work demands, making this a highly stressful occupation (Ortega, Brenner, & Leather, 2007). On a regular basis, police officers are confronted with extremely stressful and demanding situations, including exposure to the most violent, antisocial, and mistrustful elements of the society (Violanti & Aaron, 1994). Further, police officers are exposed to psychological stress and trauma, and the possibility of being exposed to physical danger, which include the threat of serious injury or death to them, and exposure to others who have been seriously injured, traumatised, or killed (Aaron, 2000), coupled with the availability of firearms (Lynch, 2007). In addition, police officers are exposed to a number of internal or organisational stressors,

which include negative perception of police by the public, perceived lack of organisational support, and interface with the judicial system (Aaron, 2000), workload, time pressure, and inadequate resources (Lynch, 2007; Rothmann, 2008). These situations can cause stress in the workplace (Rothmann, Steyn, & Mostert, 2005).

Research has established that stress impacts on psychological and psychosomatic functioning, which is detrimental to both the individual and organisation (Lynch, 2007). Individual level outcomes include high blood pressure, increased heart rate, cancer, heart disease, stomach disorders, divorce, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide (Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas, 2002; Anshel, 2000; Kohan & O'Connor, 2002; Morash, Haar, & Kwak, 2006).

Organisational level outcomes account for a greater likelihood of absenteeism, resignation, burnout, job satisfaction, motivation, job performance, and early retirement (Anderson et al., 2002; Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2006).

The aforementioned statistics are indicative that many police officers experience their circumstances as stressful (Mostert & Rothmann, 2006), which could eventually affect the work-related well-being of employees (including burnout and work engagement) (Rothmann et al., 2005). Research has shown that, once enthusiastic police officers can become detached from their work, fatigued, and cynical (Lynch, 2007). However, contrary to those who suffer from burnout (a reaction to chronic occupational stress), research has also shown that some individuals, regardless of high job demands and long working hours, seem to find pleasure in working hard and dealing with job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). According to Rothmann et al. (2005), such individuals could be described as engaged in the work.

In light of an increasing emphasis on police accountability and performance, stress among police officers is a significant issue that merits particular attention (Lynch, 2007). Moreover, the concept work engagement, which is conceptualised as the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), is important because it has positive consequences for the organisation (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008). For example, past research has provided empirical evidence, which demonstrates that high levels of work engagement are associated with positive outcomes for organisations such as increased job satisfaction, organisational commitment, motivation and low turnover intention while it improves the health and well-being of employees (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). In view of these findings, it is reasonable to suggest that an engaged workforce is likely to make a significant contribution to the police organisation where stress may be perceived as part of the job.

1.3 Problem Statement

Since the first democratic elections in 1994 the police organisation in South Africa has undergone tremendous transformation (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006). According to Van der Walt (2002), organisational transformation from a police force to a police service took place, the rank structure was changed, and an affirmative action policy was implemented (as cited in Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006). In addition to these challenges, police officers are challenged by various potential stressors, such as a high crime rate and a lack of resources (Rothmann & van Rensburg, 2002). These changes have generated a demanding context in which police officers function (Gulle et al., 1998; Mostert et al., 2006; Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006).

Against the above background, it is clear that police officers in the SAPS are exposed to stressful situations (Gulle et al., 1998; Mostert & Joubert, 2005). It is also evident that high levels of stress can have a significant impact on police officers organisational performance as

well as occupational and personal well-being (Anderson et al., 2002; Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006; Collins & Gibbs, 2003; Llorens et al., 2006). Nelson and Simmons (2003) suggest that this might affect individuals' psychological experiences of their work, consequently influencing the appraisal of situations or events as either distress or eustress (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). An explanation of the concepts of eustress and distress are provided in chapter two, section 2.1.1 of this study.

The rationale for this study is based on the fact that the stability, economic growth, and development of South Africa are dependent on the motivation, well-being, and productiveness of its police services (Wiese, Rothmann, & Storm, 2003). Therefore, it is critical for the SAPS to have police officers who are engaged in their work. Research both in South Africa and internationally has mainly focused on stressful aspects of police work. However, relatively little is known about the quality of life among police officers (Hart, Wearing, & Headey, 1995). This resulted in an overall focus on psychological stress in police work and the absence of well-being. Although it is important to investigate and address the antecedents of stress in the SAPS, it is equally important to study police officer's adaptation at work in a positive way (Hart et al., 1995). Furthermore, to the knowledge of the researcher, while the existing literature is replete with research on occupational stress, the most commonly employed method for gathering evidence in this area has been to ask survey respondents to rank-order a long list of potential stressors (e.g., Pienaar & Rothmann, 2008; Pienaar, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2007; Wiese et al., 2003). These studies have shed considerable light on some of the important stressors associated with police work; however, there is no qualitative research on the experiences of occupational stress within the policing environment. Furthermore, within the South African context, no research, to the knowledge of the researcher, has specifically addressed the perceptions and experiences of occupational stress

and work engagement of police in the SAPS. This is a glaring gap in the literature that needed to be addressed and prompted the present qualitative research study to broaden and deepen the understanding of the police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement.

The aim of the present study is to provide a qualitative account of police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement in the Dog Unit in Durban. Stress and well-being (work engagement) are integral parts of the cognitive and behavioural processes by which individuals encounter demands and identify and mobilise resources to deal with them (Gardner & O'Driscoll, 2007). A major conceptualisation of this process is the cognitive-transactional model of stress and coping developed by Richard Lazarus and his colleagues (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Appraisal is defined as the individual's evaluation of the significance of an event or situation for his or her well-being and the adequacy of resources for coping. Coping refers to an individual's thoughts and behaviours used to regulate their emotions and address underlying problems. The concepts of appraisal and coping are useful in explaining why people respond differently when exposed to the same events (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Thus, the transactional model is used as the theoretical framework for this study to understand how police officers appraise stress which might be useful in understanding why they react differently when exposed to similar situations, and why some police officers remain engaged even in the face of difficulties.

Insights gained from this study could provide important information that could benefit prospective police officers who have an interest in becoming dog handlers as well as those currently serving in this position. The information could benefit the SAPS as it serves as a contribution to knowledge and a better understanding of how police officers at the Dog Unit

function in stressful situations. This study is significant because, from an organisational perspective, occupational stress and work engagement are important; both in terms of using this information to design programmes to improve organisational conditions to either eliminate or reduce stressors and in terms of the responsibility of police organisations to ensure the well-being (e.g., work engagement) of personnel.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of the present study is to provide a qualitative account of police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement in the Dog Unit. The following research objectives have been developed to guide the study:

1. To conceptualise occupational stress and work engagement in the literature
2. To uncover dog handlers perceptions of occupational stress
3. To uncover dog handlers experiences of occupational stress
4. To uncover dog handlers perceptions of work engagement
5. To uncover dog handlers experiences of work engagement

1.4.1 Research questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How is occupational stress and work engagement conceptualised in the literature?
2. What are dog handler's perceptions of occupational stress?
3. What are dog handler's experiences of occupational stress?
4. What are dog handler's perceptions of work engagement?
5. What are dog handler's experiences of work engagement?

1.5 Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research design was adopted. A qualitative research design was chosen as qualitative research focuses on the process, understanding, and meaning of experiences, as they are interpreted through the eyes of the researcher, and is sensitive to the particular context of the study, as well as the impact of the researcher and the participants of the study. The aim of qualitative research is to see the world through the eyes of the participant, to collect data and learn about ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant, and to get the rich, descriptive data to assist in understanding the participant's construction of their social reality (Maree, 2007).

1.6 Research Methodology

The researcher made use of semi-structured interviews, using a self-developed interview schedule as a research instrument to gather data from the research participants. Interviewing in research is described as a face-to-face encounter, with the explicit purpose of finding out what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). In addition, a biographical questionnaire was used to gather information about the demographic characteristics (gender, age, race, language, marital status, years of service & rank) of the participants. This questionnaire did not request the names of participants to ensure confidentiality.

1.7 Sampling

A purposive non-probability sampling technique was used. This sampling method was used because the participants that were sought possess specific characteristics that were necessary for the study (Welman & Kruger, 2001). This technique is often used in qualitative research as a deliberate attempt to select participants from a particular sector and the selection of these participants is dependent on the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). This type of sampling

method was also chosen for the advantages of being more economical, less time-consuming, and less complicated (Welman & Kruger, 2001).

1.8 Research Participants

Police officers from the Dog Unit in the SAPS constituted the study population. The Dog unit comprises a total of 50 members. The entire group of dog handlers could not form part of the study as many of the dog handlers were on leave or away on course. Thus, in total a sample of 10 ($N=10$) members was utilised in this study.

1.9 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The interviews were transcribed and analysed for emerging themes. An integration of all material followed and thereafter emerging patterns were identified. With the informed consent of all participants, each audio-taped interview was transcribed directly onto a word processor in order to facilitate the management of data. This written record of the interview was used for detailed in-depth analysis.

According to Dey (1993), the core of qualitative data analysis lies in the process of describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how concepts interconnect. For this reason, thematic content analysis was employed to analyse the verbal material.

Thematic content analysis is described as a method of interpreting qualitative data through the 'systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes and patterns' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; p, 1278). According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), thematic content analysis is a method thought to achieve valid and reliable inferences because it involves the application of a set of systematic and transparent procedures for processing data. Thematic

content analysis is described as a method for identifying, analysing, and describing the data set in rich detail.

1.10 Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter focused on the background and rationale for the study, problem statement, aims and objectives of the study, research methodology, as well as the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter serves as a point of departure for the study and provides a description of the relevant literature on occupational stress and work engagement. The conceptualisation of occupational stress and work engagement is supported by references from journals and books.

Chapter Three: Theoretical framework

This chapter discusses the Transactional Theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) which is the theoretical foundation of this study.

Chapter Four: Description of research methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology adopted in this study. It includes a discussion of the objectives of the study, research design, size and composition of the sample, instruments utilised, data collection, processing, and analysis. In addition, reliability and validity are also discussed.

Chapter Five: Research results and discussion

In this chapter, an interpretation of the research findings is discussed based on the central themes and sub-themes extracted from the participant's perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. Where possible, these themes and sub-themes are integrated with the literature.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the study, together with the conclusions of the results and integration with previous research. A discussion of the limitations and recommendations for future research is also presented. The references, permission letters, approval letters, and interview schedule used will be found in the appendices section of the dissertation.

1.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the background to this research study. Thereafter, the problem statement was formulated along with the rationale and aims of the research which is to provide a qualitative account of police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. Lastly, the research questions were presented, followed by the research methodology and layout of the chapters.

The next chapter provides a brief overview of the literature relating to occupational stress and work engagement. It also explores and reviews previous research concerning occupational stress and work engagement in the policing environment.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to achieve good topic flow in a meaningful manner, the literature review begins with a discussion on stress, before discussing occupational stress and work engagement which are the constructs under study. The relevant literature is organised into two sections with various subsections. The first section discusses occupational stress, whilst the second section reviews work engagement.

2.2 Stress

The discussions of stress physiology began with the work of Hans Selye (1956), who proposed that any stressor triggers a uniform series of three stages of physiological responses, which he labeled the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) (Lobel & Dunkelschetter, 1990). GAS is induced by any “nonspecific stressor” that alters homeostasis (or equilibrium) in the body. The first stage is the acute alarm reaction (i.e., the fight-or-flight response, in which the body prepares for action by providing the necessary energy resources), a more chronic resistance stage (in which the body copes with the alarm stage and seeks a return to homeostasis), and a chronic exhaustion stage (in which energy resources are exhausted and the body is unable to return to homeostasis). If the stressor persists and resistance is not successful the stage of exhaustion occurs and leads to collapse (McEwen, 2005). Selye (1976) described the concept of stress as a non-specific response of the body to any demand. In this popular definition, stress is characterised as a process in which environmental demands threaten an individual’s well-being (Popoola & Ilugbo, 2010).

Selye's work was, however, criticised on the basis that it ignored the psychological impact on the individual and also the individual's ability to change the situation after recognising the stress (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997).

A more comprehensive theory of stress which rejects the nonspecific stressor and emphasises the interaction between the person and the environment is the transactional model of stress which views the stress process as being relational, as a result of a transaction between the individual and the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These researchers mention that stress arises when the demands encountered by the individual are appraised or perceived as exceeding the resources available, thereby threatening and endangering the well-being, and bringing about change in the person's psychological and/or physiological condition in order to cope with the encounter. Stressors are the antecedents (stimuli) of the transaction, which normally leads to individual strain, which is the individual's psychological, physical, and behavioural response to stressors (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001).

Following the transactional model of stress and terminology suggested by Selye (1976) and Cooper et al. (2001), this thesis will adopt the following definitions for the terms stressors, strain, and stress:

- Stressors are the antecedents (events or conditions) encountered by the individual;
- Strains are the individual's psychological, physical and, behavioural response to stressors;
- Stress is the overall transactional process where stressors and strain is present.

2.2.1 Positive and negative stress

Sometime after Selye's (1976) original conceptualisation of stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand, he made an important qualitative distinction between 'eustress' (a

productive, useful type of stress associated with positive thoughts and feelings and healthy physical states) and ‘distress’ (an unproductive type of stress that is associated with negative thoughts and feelings and disturbed physical states). According to Nelson and Simmons (2003), meaningful work leads to eustress, which would promote engagement even if the situation is demanding. Eustress reflects the extent to which cognitive appraisal of the situation is seen to either benefit or enhance an individual's well-being. Eustress is defined as a positive psychological response to a stressor as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states (e.g. vigour and dedication). Distress is defined as a negative psychological response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of negative psychological states (e.g. exhaustion and depersonalisation). Eustressed workers are engaged, meaning that they are enthusiastically involved in and pleurably occupied by the demands of the work at hand (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). According to Le Fevre, Matheny, and Kolt (2003), whether a particular demand represents eustress or distress is determined not only by the amount of demand perceived by the individual, but also the perception of the individual regarding the demand. Thus, the distressful or eustressful nature of any particular stimulus is governed by how one interprets it and chooses to react to it.

The above mentioned conceptualisation's of stress were provided to explain how stress works. However, now that the concept of stress has been defined, attention moves to occupational stress, that is, stress experienced by people at work, which is the focus of this study.

2.3 Occupational Stress

Occupational stress appears specifically within the parameters of the work environment, is caused by work-related factors, and has consequences for the work situation (Rothmann & Cooper, 2008). Lath (2010) defined occupational stress as the physical and emotional

response that occurs when a worker perceives an imbalance between their work demands and their capability and/or resources to meet these demands. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define occupational stress as a disruption of the equilibrium of the cognitive emotional environmental system by external factors. In this thesis, occupational stress is defined as an imbalance between an individual's perceived demands and their perceived ability to deal with these demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to Sarafino (2006), occupational stress consists of a physical and a psychological component, which can be examined from three fundamentally different approaches, namely: (a) stimulus-based or engineering approach (b) the response based or medico-psychological approach, and (c) the process-based or psychological approach.

2.3.1 The stimulus-based approach

The stimulus based approach, also referred to as the engineering approach, defines stress as a condition of the environment that is external to the individual and influences him or her in a disruptive way (Benmansour, 1998; Cooper et al., 2001). Stress is viewed as a negative event or situation arising from external pressures i.e. "any characteristic of the job environment which poses a threat to the individual" (Pinneau, 1975 in Sulsky & Smith, 2005, p. 5). This approach places the individual as a mere passive recipient of the stressful stimuli with no regard for individual differences or the psychological processes involved (Thong & Yap, 2000; Wilson & Hall, 2002). When applied to the context of the present study, the stimulus-based definition of stress is not used as it views police officer's as passive recipients rather than actors. However, stress as a stimulus can be useful in identifying aspects of the environment that might have a pleasant or unpleasant effect on individuals in the work place (Wilson & Hall, 2002). Placed within the context of this study it can be understood that a police officer

who is confronted with a stressful situation may engage into an emotional response, psychological distress, or physiological problems when experiencing an uncomfortable or threatening situation.

Cannon (1932), one of the first proponents of the stimulus-based approach, labelled the stress response as the ‘emergency reaction’ and is well known for his work on the ‘fight-or-flight’ response.

2.3.2 The response-based approach

The response-based approach, also known as the medico-psychological approach, describes stress in terms of the individual’s response to a threatening or disturbing stimulus (Benmansour, 1998). Stress is an individual’s psychological or physiological response to environmental or situational forces (Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002). Psychological responses entail emotions, thought patterns, or behaviour while physiological responses involve increased bodily arousal (Sarafino, 2006). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), strain stems from environmental changes that disturbs homeostasis and may be physiological, psychological, and behavioural. Thus, the focus of this model is on physiological, psychological, and behavioural responses which may appear as consequences of stress (Wilson & Hall, 2002). Applied to the context of the present study, police officers in this model are described as passive recipients who are pressurised by resultant stress (Wilson & Hall, 2002). As far as police officers are concerned, this approach describes stress as a response that occurs in the police officer’s mind or body when confronted with environmental or situational forces.

Selye (1956), one of the proponents of this approach, proposed that any stressor, either psychological or biological, triggers a uniform series of three stages (alarm, resistance, and

exhaustion) of physiological responses, which he labelled the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS).

2.3.3 The process-based approach

The process-based approach which is also known as the interactional model or psychological approach, attempts to overcome the limitations of both the stimulus approach and the response approach. The core assumption of this approach is an acknowledgment of individual's differential stress responses. Stress is treated as a psychological state "which is the internal representation of a particular and problematic transaction between the person and his or her environment" (Cooper & Payne, 1991, p. 8). In this model, police officers are not passive recipients of the external pressures and are seen as the actors (Wilson & Hall, 2002). Within the context of the present study, when a police officer perceives his environment as dangerous with no social support, it can be stressful; however exposed to the same environment with social support, it may be less stressful.

Lazarus (1966), one of the proponents of this approach, view the stress process as being relational, as a result of the transaction between the person and the environment, where stress arises when the demands encountered by the individual are appraised or perceived as exceeding the resources available to them, thus threatening their well-being. This approach to stress will be used as a theoretical basis of this study and will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

From the above mentioned approaches to stress it can be seen that stress is a complex phenomenon. The complexity of the term stress lies in the fact that people react to situations very differently, and therefore, what can be a source of stress and a negative experience to one

person can be a very positive experience to someone else (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005). According to Drummond (2009) stress only results when the demands placed on a person threatens something important to that person. This explanation might explain why police officers working under the same conditions in the same environment perceive the demands placed upon them differently.

With the above mentioned approaches to stress in mind, the following section will discuss the antecedents of occupational stress.

2.4 Antecedents of Occupational Stress

In an attempt to understand stress and its complexities it is important to uncover the sources of stress (Nelson & Burke, 2002). Drawing primarily from the research of Maslach-Pines and Keinan (2006), the most common sources of occupational stress that can be expected to have a measure of impact on work engagement in the workplace have been grouped into four main categories, namely: (a) task related stressors, (b) organisational stressors, (c) external stressors, and (d) personal stressors. An explanation of these stressors inherent in the policing environment follows:

2.4.1 Task related stressors

Task related stressors refers to those stressors related to the fundamental nature of the police officer's role (Maslach-Pines & Keinan, 2006), and are further divided into acute versus chronic stressors (Anshel, 2000). Acute stress is derived from an extreme or unusual external stimulus perceived as threatening and which provoke significant changes in psychological, physiological, and behavioural reactions (Anshel, 2000). In the police service, sources of acute stress include facing unpredictable and dangerous situations (Anshel, 2000), physical

danger, including the threat of serious injury or death to themselves, and exposure to others who have been seriously injured, killed, or otherwise traumatised (Aaron, 2000). In addition, many officers are afraid of being injured or killed (Toch, 2002). According to Maslach-Pines and Keinan (2006), the highest ranking acute stressors are violence and the fear of violence; however, topping the list of acute stressors is the death of a fellow officer on duty or having to take a life in the line of duty and, shooting incidents (Abdollahi, 2002).

Peltzer (2001) conducted a study on stress and traumatic symptoms among police officers in the SAPS. The study revealed that the most frequent and stressful incidents as reported by police officers were the following: responding to a scene involving the accidental injury of a child, finding a corpse after a murder, the pursuit of an armed suspect, duty-related violent injuries (shooting), and accidents with a departmental vehicle (Peltzer, 2001).

Chronic stress refers to stress that builds over time and does not resolve itself quickly (Anderson et al., 2002). The most common chronic police stressors are related to the structure of the police officer's work, including work overload and shift work (Toch, 2002); ongoing harassment by others; and regular patrols in an unsafe area (Anshel, 2000). Other chronic stressors include role conflict and role overload (Brown & Campbell, 1994).

2.4.2 Organisational stressors

Organisational stressors are related to the organisational structure of the police service (Brown & Campbell, 1994), and are further divided into two groups, namely: job demands and a lack of resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). A definition and explanation of these terms are provided in section 2.7 of this study and will therefore not be discussed here.

Primary work demands for police officers include lack of administrative support, lack of voice

in decision-making, lack of opportunities for advancement, coupled with inadequate supervision, bureaucratic nature of police departments and large amounts of paper work (Brown & Campbell, 1994; Toch, 2002). Job demands and a lack of resources contribute to stress, which leads to burnout and low work engagement (Rothmann et al., 2005).

Rothmann and Jorgensen (2007) conducted a study to explore the sources of stress experienced by police officers of the Local Criminal Record Center (LCRC) in the SAPS. The results revealed stressors including staff shortages, excessive paperwork, inadequate or poor quality equipment, working unsociable hours and exposure to violent situations. In addition, the results of the study revealed that high job demands and a lack of resources (organisational support) are strongly related to exhaustion and depersonalisation. Findings further indicated that a lack of resources resulted in police officers feeling less motivated which is then associated with disengagement. Members having adequate resources at their disposal experience support from the organisation and are therefore more committed to the SAPS (Rothmann & Jorgensen, 2007).

Another South African study investigating stress among police officers in the SAPS identified high job demands and the lack of resources as being the main sources of stress (Meyer, Rothmann, & Pienaar, 2003).

2.4.3 External stressors

According to Maslach-Pines and Keinan (2006), external stressors originate outside the police service. External stressors include: (a) a demanding and at times hostile public, (b)

sensational media that appears to be hostile to the police, (c) a judicial system that is easier on criminals, and (d) ineffective punitive system.

2.4.4 Personal stressors

According to Maslach-Pines and Keinan (2006), personal stressors include work-home conflicts. A career as a police officer entails a heavy psychological price (e.g., guilt feelings) that results from the conflict they experience between their work and family demands (Brown & Campbell, 1994). The relationships that people share within the home environment can also be a source of stress. Balancing more than one role may not always be easy and the person fulfilling these roles may at times feel as if he or she does not have sufficient resources to cope with the demands of the situation (Brannon & Feist, 2004).

Mostert et al. (2006) investigated the mediating role of positive work-home interaction between job resources and work engagement of police officers. The results of this study indicated that job resources have a strong and positive relationship with work engagement and positive work-home interaction. Based on the results of this study, it appears that the availability of job resources may help police officers cope with the demanding aspects of their work (Mostert et al., 2006).

In conclusion, stress in the policing environment can be seen as deriving from different sources. The level of stress that individual's experience also depends largely on their perception of these sources and on their perceived ability to cope (Brannon & Feist, 2004). In the following section, previous research on stress within the police will be discussed.

2.5 Previous Research on Stress in Policing

Collins and Gibbs (2003) conducted a cross-sectional study among 1206 constables and sergeants within a county police force to examine the sources of stress-related symptoms within the police officers and measure the prevalence of significant associated mental-health. This study found that occupational stressors ranking most highly within the population were not specific to policing, but to organisational issues such as the demands of work impinging upon home life, lack of consultation and communication, lack of control over workload, inadequate support and excess workload in general.

Shane (2010), in his research, conducted a study among 461 police officers from two departments in Michigan and New Jersey to examine the impact of organisational stressors on police performance. The results of this study were largely consistent with previous studies which suggest that several facets (i.e., bureaucracy, management & organisational capacity) of police organisation are sources of stress that subsequently leads to lower performance.

Similarly, a study conducted by Gulle et al. (1998) of 91 SAPS members in the Cape Peninsula, showed that in comparison to stressors reported by police in the United States, most of which were inherent in the nature of the job, South African Police stressors were more organisationally oriented. The results of this study show the South African sample to evidence a greater degree of stress than the United States of America (USA) sample. Furthermore, the results indicate that the way in which the police organisation operates in South Africa creates stress additional to the inherent pressures already existing as a result of the nature of police work.

In another study, Pienaar and Rothmann (2006) conducted a cross-sectional survey of 2,145 police officers from nine provinces in South Africa to identify the frequency and intensity of

occupational stressors, and to assess the differences between the stressors for race, rank and gender groups. This study found that the most important stressors were other officers not doing their job, inadequate or poor quality equipment, inadequate salaries, and seeing criminals go free.

The results of the aforementioned studies indicate that police officers face various stressors in the organisation. So what prompts employees to work in such an organisation? Whilst much of earlier studies have focused on the negative aspects or experiences of stress (e.g. Jorgensen & Rothmann, 2008; Wiese et al., 2003), and on negative concepts and emotions such as job dissatisfaction, alienation, burnout and intent to quit (Burke & El-Kot, 2010), the present study endeavours to focus on the positive outcomes or experiences of occupational stress (i.e. work engagement). So what exactly is work engagement and how has it been conceptualised?

2.6 Work Engagement

In order to survive and successfully compete in the rapidly changing world of work, organisations need to develop and retain employees who are highly motivated, able to give off their best, willing to go the extra mile, and persist even in the face of difficulties (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Thus, this necessitates the need for organisations to have employees who are brimming with energy and self-confidence, are enthusiastic and passionate about their work, and are fully involved in their work activities (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). In other words, the modern working environment requires an engaged work force.

2.6.1 Defining work engagement

The following theories that have emerged over the past few decades are used to define work engagement:

2.6.1.1 Kahn (1990)

Kahn (1990) is widely credited with the first application and use of engagement theory in the workplace (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010). Kahn wrote that engagement is a motivational variable spanning the extrinsic and intrinsic continuum, promoting the use of an employee's full self in their work roles. Kahn (1990) conceptualised the scholarly definition of work engagement as "the harnessing of organisation member's selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694).

In other words, Kahn (1990) contends that engagement is a multidimensional construct, in the sense that employees are physically involved in their tasks, cognitively alert, and emotionally connected to others when performing their jobs. Therefore, the more engaged they are in each dimension, the higher their overall personal engagement in work activities.

Alternatively, Kahn (1990) defines personal disengagement as the uncoupling of the self from work roles and involves people withdrawing and defending themselves during work role performances. Disengaged employees become disconnected from their jobs and hide their true identity, thoughts, and feelings when performing their roles (Olivier & Rothmann, 2008). Kahn (1990) posited that three psychological conditions, namely: (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) availability were important to fully understanding why a person would become engaged or disengaged in his or her work role.

The first psychological condition, *meaningfulness*, is defined as the positive "sense of return on investments of self in role performance" (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). In other words,

meaningfulness deals with how valuable a work goal is in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004).

The second psychological condition, *safety*, is defined as “feeling able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career” (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). An individual feels safe in an environment which has boundaries regarding acceptable behaviour. Because individuals understand these boundaries, they are able to express their engagement at work, without fear of reprimand (May et al., 2004).

The third psychological condition, *availability*, refers to “the sense of having the physical, emotional or psychological resources to engage at a particular moment” (Kahn, 1990, p. 714).

The extent to which individuals are available to engage is influenced by physical energy, emotional energy, insecurity (e.g., lack of self-confidence, heightened self-consciousness and ambivalence about fit with the organisation), and non-work events (May et al., 2004).

According to Kahn (1990), an individual is psychologically available to engage in their professional roles when he or she has positively assessed their ability to deal with both work and non-work aspects of their lives.

Two studies have been found that reported on the relationship between psychological conditions and employee engagement. The study by May et al. (2004) confirmed that psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability predict employee engagement. In a South African study, Olivier and Rothmann (2008) confirmed that psychological meaningfulness and psychological availability predict employee engagement.

2.6.1.2 Maslach and Leiter (1997)

Another model of work engagement has been put forward by Maslach and Leiter (1997). These researchers expanded on their conceptualisation of burnout and proposed that engagement was the opposite or positive antithesis of burnout. They rephrased burnout as an erosion of engagement with the job. According to this model, work engagement is characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the direct opposite of the three burnout dimensions, namely: exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy. In essence, Maslach and Leiter (1997) maintain that when employees are engaged, they are characterised by high levels of energy, involvement, and a high level of personal accomplishment or self-efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

2.6.1.3 Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002)

A different approach to work engagement was adopted by Schaufeli et al. (2002) who agrees with the assertion that engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout, but defines and operationalises engagement in its own right as a persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state of fulfilment in individuals that is not focused on a particular object, event, individual, or behaviour (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Specifically, work engagement is defined as a “persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 417). The benefits of these experiences of work engagement as led the researcher to seek reasons that may cause the state to occur and be sustained.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) identify three dimensions of work engagement, as independent of burnout, namely: vigour, dedication, and absorption. In line with research by Mostert et al. (2006), the current study considers all three dimensions as significant elements that will contribute to employee’s engaging themselves in their work roles.

The first dimension, *vigour*, is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, and the willingness to invest high effort in one's work, and persistence in difficult situations (Albrecht, 2010; Burke & El-Kot, 2010). Vigour encompasses energy, resilience, and perseverance (Albrecht, 2010). Thus, an employee who feels great vigour at work is characterised as being highly motivated by his or her job and is also more likely to remain persistent even in the face of difficulties. Mauno, Kinnunen, and Ruokolainen (2007) consider the dimension of vigour to be similar to the concept of motivation, in particular, intrinsic motivation. They define intrinsic motivation as an individual's need to perform a certain activity at work because this activity gives inherent pleasure and satisfaction and does not contain extrinsic goals such as better salary and/or promotion.

Applied to the context of the present study, the dimension of vigour reflects why some police officers are ready to devote effort in their work, exhibit high levels of energy while working, and tend to remain resolute in the face of difficult tasks, challenges, or failure.

The second dimension, *dedication*, refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing feelings of pride, significance, enthusiasm, and challenge (Burke & El-Kot, 2010). Dedication encompasses a sense of inspiration, pride, and enthusiasm. In addition, it refers to finding personal meaning in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Applied to the context of this study, the dimension of dedication reflects the importance of police work in police officer's lives, i.e. whether they derive a sense of significance, are enthusiastic and proud, and inspired and challenged by their work.

The third dimension, *absorption*, is characterised by being fully immersed, concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, with the employee finding it difficult to detach from work activities (Burke & El-Kot, 2010). This means that employees are totally immersed in their work, forgetting about everything else.

In line with this study, the dimension absorption reflects whether police officers are fully immersed in their work, and reluctant to detach themselves from their work roles.

2.6.1.4 May et al. (2004)

According to May et al. (2004), for employees to thrive at work they must be able to completely immerse themselves in their work. Thus, it is important for employees to bring their physical, emotional and cognitive resources when they engage themselves in work roles. These authors believe that in the face of difficulties, psychological empowerment increases employee's sense of personal control and motivates them to engage in work. According to Spreitzer (1995), psychological empowerment refers to an individual's experience of intrinsic motivation that is based on cognitions about himself or herself in relation to his or her work role. These cognitions are related to the psychological states identified by Kahn (1990) that impact on the intrinsic motivation of employees.

2.6.1.5 Bakker and Demerouti (2008)

Bakker and Demerouti (2008, p. 210), maintain that engaged employees are not superhuman, given that they do feel tired after a long day of hard work, but neither are they addicted to their work. These authors state that such employees ascribe their tiredness as a pleasant state because it is associated with positive accomplishments. They maintain that engaged employees have activities that they enjoy outside their working environment, and unlike

workaholics, they do not work hard because of a strong and irresistible inner drive, but because for them working is fun. In other words, engaged employees report that their jobs make good use of their skills and abilities, are challenging, and stimulating, and provide them with a sense of personal accomplishment (Roberts & Devonport, 2002).

2.6.1.6 The definition of work engagement adopted by the present study

In the present study, the definition of work engagement as advocated by Schaufeli et al. (2002) is adopted. Firstly, the present study aims to gather information on police officer's perceptions and experiences of work engagement and not burnout. Therefore this definition which separates work engagement from the related concept of burnout is relevant. Secondly, Schaufeli et al. (2002) provided a definition that encompasses both the affective and cognitive aspects of work engagement which implies that in addition to cognitions, engagement also involves an active utilisation of emotions and feelings which is relevant to this qualitative study. Thirdly, as mentioned above, this definition splits engagement into three dimensions, namely: (a) vigour, (b) dedication, and (c) absorption which can be analysed separately to accurately detect the strengths and weaknesses that exist in terms of each dimension of work engagement. Thus, taking the above-mentioned reasons into consideration, work engagement in the present study will be defined as, "...a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74).

2.7 Antecedents of Work Engagement

2.7.1 Job Demands

Job demands refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of a job that require an individual to exert high levels of sustained physical and/or psychological effort in order to maintain expected standards of performance. Job demands can be viewed as

challenges represented by work or they can be viewed as negative responses when they exceed the individual's capability to deal with them (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006).

Studies have demonstrated that individuals can experience work engagement in situations of high demand. For example, Doyle and Hind (1998) found that despite having to work long hours, coupled with work overload, and lack of support, female academics working in higher education institutions reported being satisfied and intrinsically motivated by their jobs, which they perceived as being enjoyable and potentially rewarding.

2.7.2 Job Resources

Job resources are defined as “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that not only potentially reduce the negative effects of job demands and help to achieve work goals, but may also stimulate personal growth, learning and development, and positive state of work engagement” (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008, p. 79). This suggest that job resources are not only important in dealing with job demands, but they also are important in their own right too (Hakannen et al., 2008). Several studies have shown a positive relationship between job resources and work engagement. For example, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) found evidence for a positive relationship between three job resources (performance feedback, social support, and supervisory coaching) and work engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) among Dutch employees working in an insurance company, an occupational health and safety service company, a pension fund company, and a home care institution. More specifically, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) used structural equation modeling to show that job resources and not job demands exclusively predicted engagement, and that engagement is a mediator of the relationship between job resources and turnover intentions.

In addition, Hakanen et al. (2008) provides evidence of job resources being a precursor to work engagement. These authors indicate that having control over the job and experiencing organisation based self-esteem are among the best predictors of the dimensions of work engagement, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption.

In addition to job demands and job resources, several studies have highlighted the importance of personal resources as precursors in stimulating employee's engagement in their work roles.

2.7.3 Personal Resources

Personal resources are defined as positive self-evaluations that foster resiliency to set backs and refer to "individual's sense of their ability to successfully control and impact their environment, especially during challenging circumstances" (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003, p. 632). The results from several studies have supported the relationship between personal resources and work engagement. Rothman and Storm (2003) found that engaged police officers had an active coping style, such that they were problem-focused and were proactive about removing or rearranging possible stressors. In addition, personal resources such as intrinsic motivation, competence, coping strategies, and feelings of personal accomplishment have been identified as influencing levels of work engagement (Lynch, 2007; Rothmann & Storm, 2003). Similarly, Riolli and Savicki (2003) showed that information service worker's personal resources, such as optimism and control coping were particularly beneficial when work resources were low. The greater the personal resources, the more positive the self-evaluation is expected to be.

Bakker and Demerouti (2008) have proposed a model, which depicts the interplay between work engagement, job demands, job resources, and personal resources (Figure 1).

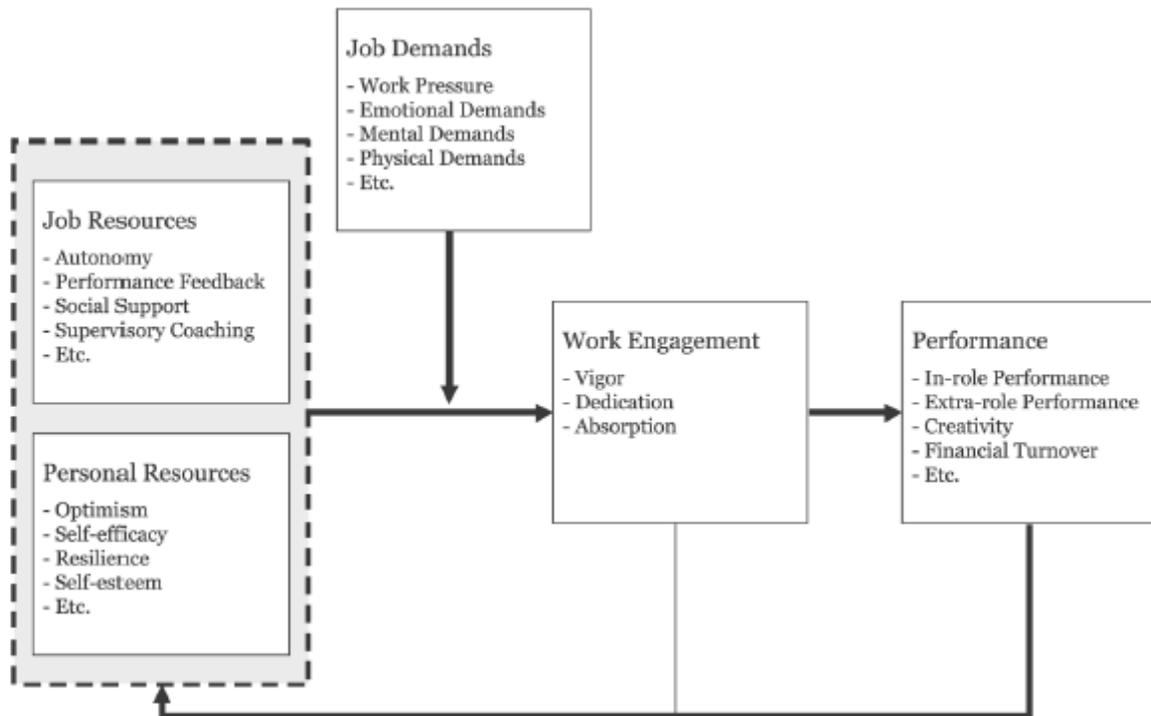


Figure 1. Overall model of work engagement. Adapted from Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2008), “Towards a model of engagement”, *Career Development International*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 209-223.

This model of work engagement suggests that job resources and personal resources independently or combined actively promotes work engagement. Furthermore, it proposes that the impact of job and personal resources on work engagement is stronger when job demands are high. In addition, according to this model, high levels of work engagement can manifest in better performance. Finally, the model argues that a combination of high engagement and improved performance inspires individuals to create their own resources, which subsequently enhances engagement again over time.

In conclusion, job and personal resources are important antecedents of work engagement. The above mentioned research shows that the relationship between work engagement and job and personal resources is complex and mutually reinforcing. That is, an appropriate supply of job resources and higher levels of personal resources have motivational potential in the face of high job demands and can result in stronger work engagement and improved performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The researcher expects this study to add to the work engagement concept by fostering an understanding of which job or personal resources make police officers more likely to engage in their work activities.

2.8 Previous Research on Work Engagement in the Police

Many studies conducted within the SAPS provides evidence supporting the relationship between positive perceptions of stress and work engagement, in that, despite the stressful nature of police work, employees report being actively engaged in their work. Rothmann and Storm (2003) conducted a cross-sectional study among 1,910 South African police members to determine the relationship between engagement, job stress and coping. This study found that engaged police officers who exhibit an active coping style (i.e. these police officers were problem focused; taking active steps in an attempt to remove or rearrange stressors) are more likely to report high work engagement (on vigour and dedications subscales). Further, the authors found that low stress due to job demands predicted higher work engagement.

In another study, Mostert and Rothmann (2006), using a cross-sectional survey of 1,794 South African Police officers, found that background variables (e.g. gender, age, race) make only a minor contribution to work engagement.

The third study, conducted by Bakker, Emmerik, and Euwema (2006) identified the relationship between the experience of occupational stress and the degree to which people are

engaged in their work. This study investigated the crossover of burnout and work engagement among 2,229 Royal Dutch constabulary officers, working in a team environment. These authors found that officers who worked in teams that were characterised by a high prevalence of burnout, developed feelings of exhaustion and negative attitudes towards their work (cynicism) and themselves (reduced professional efficacy).

While work engagement among policemen has been investigated, these quantitative studies have focused on elucidating the predictive relationship between engagement, job stress and coping (Rothman & Storm, 2003), job satisfaction, occupational stress, burnout and work engagement as components of work-related wellbeing (Rothman, 2008). The present study adopts a different approach, a qualitative study to understand police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement.

2.9 Relationship between Occupational Stress and Work Engagement

Regarding the relationship between occupational stress and work engagement, research has shown that even when exposed to high job demands and working long hours, some individuals do not show symptoms of disengagement. Instead, they seem to find pleasure in dealing with these stressors (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Recently, Britt and Bliese (2003) found that job engagement buffered individuals from the adverse effects of a stressful military operation. Those soldiers who reported high job engagement did not show increases in psychological distress when reporting high levels of stress as a result of environmental conditions, family separation, or work problems. However, those soldiers who reported low job engagement showed a strong relationship between reports

of stressors and psychological distress, reporting more symptoms under conditions of high stress.

In another study, Britt, Adler, and Bartone (2001) found that during a stressful military deployment, high job engagement contributes to the meaning soldiers assign to their work on the mission, which is prospectively related to benefits (e.g., increased stress resilience) soldiers report getting out of the operation.

2.10 The Transactional Model of Stress and Work Engagement

As previously mentioned, meaningful work leads to eustress, which would promote engagement even if the situation is demanding. Eustress reflects the extent to which cognitive appraisal of the situation is seen to either benefit or enhance an individual's well-being. Eustress is defined as a positive psychological response to a stressor as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states (e.g., vigour and dedication). Eustressed workers are engaged, meaning that they are enthusiastically involved in and pleurably occupied by the demands of the work at hand (Nelson & Simmons, 2003).

Similarly, Jackson, Rothmann and Van de Vijver (2006) found that meaningful work leads to the cognitive appraisal of an event or situation as challenging but positive i.e. benefiting or enhancing an individual's well-being. This in turn promotes work engagement even in demanding situations where the conditions for engagement are poor.

Previous research conducted by Simmons and Nelson (2001) provides evidence supporting the relationship between positive perceptions of stress and work engagement in their finding that,

despite the stressful nature of nursing, their sample reported being actively engaged in their work.

Moreover, Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris (2008) explain the relationship between the transactional model and work engagement in the following statement: “engaged employees have a sense of energetic and affective connection with their work, and instead of stressful and demanding they look upon (i.e. appraise) their work as challenging” (p. 188).

Given the importance of engagement for performance and psychological health, it is important to consider factors that may promote an individual’s level of engagement in a task or activity even when the conditions for engagement are poor.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter began by providing an outline of the different conceptualisations of stress proposed by theorists. An agreement among the theorists is that, for stress to occur, the individual must perceive the demand placed on him or her as excessive and uncontrollable. The study went on to provide different conceptualisations of occupational stress. In addition, the various approaches to occupational stress were outlined. The antecedent’s of occupational stress was presented. Thereafter, previous research on stress in the police was presented. The discussion of the policing profession is relevant to this study, as it serves the purpose of exploring dog handler’s perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement in the SAPS.

In the section on work engagement, the various theoretical definitions surrounding the concept of work engagement was presented. For the purpose of this study, the researcher concluded

that Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) model presents the most robust conceptualisation of this construct, and is therefore used in the current study. Furthermore, the three dimensions of work engagement: (a) vigour, (b) dedication, and (c) absorption were presented. The antecedents of work engagement with specific reference job demands, job resources, and personal resources were also described. Thereafter, previous research on work engagement in the police and the relationship between stress and work engagement was discussed. Finally, the link between the transactional model of stress and work engagement was outlined.

The next chapter presents models of stress and well-being to show support for the use of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model in this study. Furthermore, a detailed explanation of the transactional model of stress and coping is provided.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by outlining models of occupational stress and well-being to show support for the use of the transactional model in this study. In addition, a detailed explanation of the transactional model of stress and coping will follow.

3.2 Models of Stress and Well-being at Work

Several models of stress relating specifically to occupational stress have been developed in an attempt to better understand the relationship between work characteristics and employee well-being. This section will refer to three models briefly before discussing the transactional model of stress and coping.

3.2.1 The Person-Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit Theory)

The P-E Fit Theory outlined by Edwards, Caplan and Harrison (1998), makes explicit not only the importance of the interaction between the individual and the environment in shaping their response to work situations and events, but also the importance of the individual's perception of the environment, themselves, and the interaction between them. Thus, the P-E Fit Theory can be discussed as a subjective model, referring to the fit between the subjective person and the subjective environment (i.e. the individual's perceptions of the P-E fit). Harrison emphasised that there are two aspects of fit between an individual and the environment: the degree to which an individual's skills and abilities meet the demands required of them and the extent to which the environment meets the individual's needs. The central premise of the P-E Fit Theory is that stress can arise as a result of a lack of fit of either of these two measures. Thus, in this model stress is not defined in terms of the environment or the individual, but

rather in terms of the degree of misfit between them (Edwards, et al., 1998). This subjective model is particularly useful in the occupational stress process where it is the employees' perception of the work environment and their ability to manage that environment which may lead to the experience of occupational stress (Edwards, et al., 1998). Police officer's perception of the work environment and their ability to manage the environment may lead to the experience of stress.

3.2.2 Conservation of Resources Model (COR model)

Hobfoll (2001) has expanded the stress and coping theory with respect to the conservation of resources as the central human motive in the struggle with stressful encounters. Hobfoll (2002) conceptualises resources as those objects, personal attributes, conditions, or forces that are highly valued by the individual. Resources have a symbolic as well as an instrumental value to the individual and any threat to these resources causes stress or a challenge. When considering the COR model, it can be assumed that police officers also utilise resources in order to cope with situations that are perceived as threatening or challenging. A police officer may use his or her training background or previous experience as a resource. The police officer's family can be of support (a resource) when the officer experiences stress as a result of a shooting incident or loss of a colleague. The police officer's commander or colleagues can be of support (a resource) during departmental investigations.

3.2.3 Job Demands-Resources Model (JDR- Model)

The JDR-model assumes that every occupation has its own specific risk factors that lead to job stress and these factors can be classified into two categories: job demands and job resources. Both these concepts were explained in detail in section 2.7 of chapter two in this study and, will therefore not be explained again in this section.

Rich et al. (2010) argue that the JDR-model fails to account for the important distinction among types of demands with respect to the way they tend to be appraised by employees and that when this distinction is made; meaningful relationships between demands and engagement emerge. Further, these authors argue that this inconsistency can be explained using the transactional model of stress. This model proposes that stressful situations such as job demands are appraised as either challenging or threatening according to the perceived significance of the situation for their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

3.3 Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping is used as the theoretical framework for this study. This model defines stress as a 'particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being' (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). According to Brannon and Feist (2004), this definition is important for several reasons. Firstly, this definition of stress represents the transactional approach which emphasises the interaction between the person and his or her environment in determining stress. Secondly, this definition emphasises the importance of the person's appraisal of the psychological situation. Thirdly, stress arises only in situations that are appraised as threatening, challenging or potentially harmful. According to Gardner and O'Driscoll (2007), the focus of this model is on individual and situational factors that interact with the appraisal of demands to produce outcomes

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress was further adapted by McGowan (2004) to explicitly recognise for the first time that individual outcomes of work demands;

rather than being only negative resulting in distress, can also be positive resulting in eustress (see Figure 2 below).

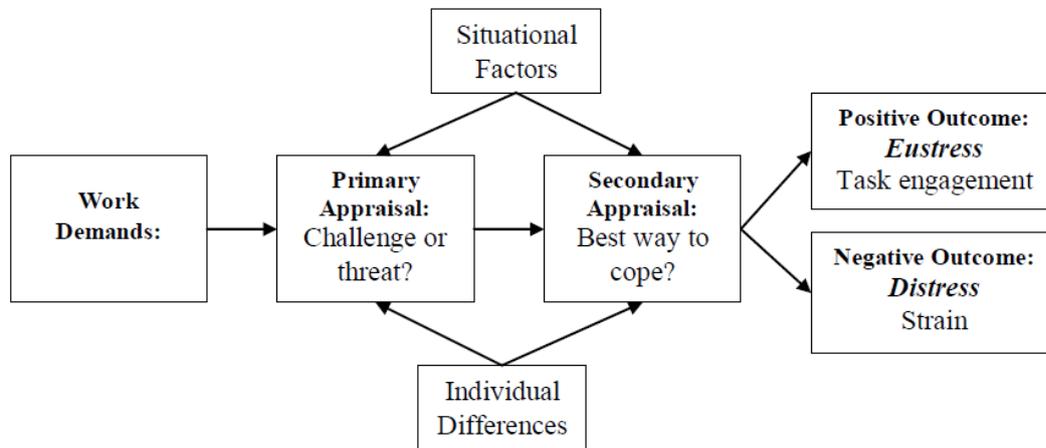


Figure 2: An appraisal-coping model of occupational stress (McGowan, 2004)

The core model developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and expanded on by McGowan (2004) provides the most comprehensive understanding of the process of occupational stress.

3.3.1 Work Demands

This process begins with physical and/or psychological demands (Gardner & O’Driscoll, 2007). Maslach-Pines and Kienan (2006) grouped the occupational demands or stressors which can activate the processes of appraisal and coping in police officers into four main categories, namely: task related stressors, organisational stressors, external stressors, and personal stressors. These occupational demands or stressors were discussed in detail in chapter 2 of this study, and will therefore not be addressed in detail in this section. These occupational demands are usually stressful for one, but challenging for another because other factors invariably give rise to stress. Whether or not a demanding situation will lead to

positive or negative outcomes depends on how the demand is appraised and how it is managed (Gardner & O'Discoll, 2007).

3.3.2 Cognitive Appraisal

Cognitive appraisal is defined as “the process of categorising an encounter, and its various facets, with respect to its significance for well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 31).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), cognitive appraisal processes play an integral role in how people react in different situations. These researchers purported that a situation is considered as threatening or stressful depending on the person's perception of the event or situation. Relevant to the present study, a police officer's interpretation of an event or stimulus involves the process of cognitive appraisal.

Cognitive appraisal includes three component processes, namely: (a) primary appraisal, (b) secondary appraisal, and (c) reappraisal.

3.3.2.1 Primary Appraisal

Primary appraisal is the first cognitive process where a person evaluates a particular event, situation, or demand. If the environment is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources and endangering his or her well-being, coping is activated (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 31), common questions an individual will ask during the primary appraisal are: “Am I in trouble or being benefited now or in the future, and in what way?” In the police officer's situation, once an encounter, event, or stimulus is detected, primary appraisal involves evaluating the significance of the event (Anshel, 2000).

According to Lee and Poole (2005), a person's initial appraisal of an event can take one or a combination of the following forms: (a) irrelevant, (b) benign-positive, and (c) stressful.

3.2.2.1.1 Irrelevant primary appraisal

Environmental stimuli appraised as being irrelevant are not regarded as being stressors. An irrelevant stimulus has no bearing on an individual's well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sulsky & Smith, 2005). If a police officer perceives an event as irrelevant or benign-positive, it is not stressful and does not require coping (Anshel, 2000).

3.2.2.1.2 Benign-positive appraisal

Encounters, events or situations are appraised as benign-positive when the outcomes of the transaction are perceived as positive and hold the promise of maintaining or enhancing one's well-being. This type of appraisal is characterised by positive psychological states such as: happiness and exhilaration (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sulsky & Smith, 2005). In addition, benign-positive appraisals are characterised by apprehension, anxiety and guilt. This may occur as a result of fear an individual might experience regarding the potential loss of desired psychological states, or having to endure harm at a later stage.

3.2.2.1.3 Stressful primary appraisal

Environmental stimuli are appraised as being negative or stressful when the outcome of a transaction is perceived to represent harm or loss, pose a threat, or is considered a challenge (Brannon & Feist, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If a police officer's appraisal of an event is perceived as (a) threatening, (b) harmful, or (c) challenging, the event is stressful and requires coping.

A *'harm or loss appraisal'*, is defined as damage that has already been done, i.e. a transaction in which the individual has already incurred some physical and/or psychological damage (Lazarus, 1993). The appraisal of a situation as harm or loss is perceived when a police officer has experienced physical or mental hurt, disappointment, or has lost something of value (Anshel, 2000). Specific examples of stressors associated with harm or loss appraisals include being reprimanded, being injured, feeling pain, or making an error which may generate emotions such as feelings of anger, disgust, disappointment and sadness (Anshel, 2000; Brannon & Feist, 2004).

A *'threat appraisal'*, entails the anticipation of future harm (Lazarus, 1993). Threat is an appropriate appraisal of situations which poses risks to one's psychological or physical well-being. The appraisal of a situation as a threat should be accompanied by thinking of the worst case scenarios and then taking appropriate caution (Anshel, 2000). A threat appraisal reflects the uncertainty of a situation. Within the police environment, one source of police stress that is often accompanied by threat appraisals is domestic dispute. The uncertainty of the situation is accompanied by self-statements such as: Will there be a weapon involved in the incident? What is the state of mind of the individuals involved in the dispute? Are drugs or alcohol influencing their behaviour? Police officers who attend domestic disputes often have to deal with heightened, perhaps irrational, or emotional people. Given the nature of police work, threat appraisals are inherent, even necessary; however they are also very stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A threat appraisal may produce feelings of worry, anxiety or fear (Brannon & Feist, 2004).

A *'challenge appraisal'*, is defined as one which an individual perceives to be very demanding, but at the same time, he or she is confident in his or her capacity to control and/or

overcome the difficult demand (Brannon & Feist, 2004; Lazarus, 1993; Sulsky & Smith, 2005). According to Anshel (2000), challenge appraisal affords an individual the opportunity for potential gain or growth due to the stressful event. Within the police environment, examples of challenge appraisal include approaching a person who demonstrates unstable or irrational behaviour, patrolling an unsafe area, or responding to a possible homicide. Each of these situations requires a sense of anticipation, predictability, and control (Anshel, 2000). As far as police officers are concerned, a challenging transaction is one the police officer perceives to be very demanding, but at the same time, he or she is confident of his or her capacity to control and/or overcome the difficult demand. Sources of police stress that are accompanied by a challenge appraisal include dangerous situations (e.g., a high speed car chase, or arresting a violent criminal) which might result in less intense stress and heightened sense of control (Anshel, 2000). A challenge appraisal may be followed by excitement or anticipation (Brannon & Feist, 2004).

According to Gulle et al. (1998), the policing environment has some sources of stress which are widespread, even inherent (e.g., witnessing a fellow officer killed in the line of duty, killing someone in the line of duty, recovering bodies from motor vehicle accidents); however the perceptions of stress reflect the police officer's interpretation of events as either currently or potentially harmful, threatening or challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Cognitive appraisals strongly influence the perceived intensity of the stressor, the extent to which the stressor is viewed as important, and the choice of coping strategy (Gardner & O'Driscoll, 2007). Individuals who have desirable personal dispositions (e.g., high degrees of optimism, self-esteem, self-confidence) are more likely to resist stress, and less likely to make stress appraisals, and will more often appraise stressful events as challenging, rather than

harmful or threatening. However, if a stressor is perceived as harmful or threatening, the individual will engage in secondary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

3.3.2.2 Secondary Appraisal

Secondary appraisal includes an individual's attempt to identify and assess what coping options and personal resources are available to deal with the perceived challenge or threat (Gardner & O'Driscoll, 2007). During the secondary appraisal salient questions asked by the individual include: "What options are available to me?", "Will this alleviate my stress?" and "What is the likelihood that I can successfully apply the necessary (response) to reduce this stress?" (Brannon & Feist, 2004, p. 109)

Coping is defined as a variety of cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals use to manage, tolerate, master and reduce internal and or external demands that are appraised as exceeding their resources (Anderson et al., 2002; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Folkman and Lazarus (1980, 1985) identified two main styles of coping: Problem-focused (active) coping and emotion-focused (passive) coping. The former refers to a process of actively dealing with the source of stress, whereas the latter reflects attempts to deal with the emotional distress that is evoked by the problem. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004), have identified other categories of coping, including meaning-focused coping, in which values, beliefs and goals can be drawn upon to find meaning given to and personal response to stressful situations, and social coping in which other people provide emotional support or practical help (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

According to Meyer et al. (2003), police officers seem to favour emotion-focused coping strategies; however this form of coping is associated with alcohol abuse, divorce, and suicide

ideation amongst police officers. Police officers who use active coping strategies are less stressed than officers who use passive coping styles (Anshel, 2000).

3.3.2.3 Reappraisal

Finally, reappraisal is rethinking the strategy to cope with a situation in light of new information provided by the circumstances. It is a process of continually evaluating, changing, or relabeling earlier primary or secondary appraisals as the situation evolves. During this phase, earlier appraisals of a situation that were perceived as threatening may now be viewed as a challenge or as benign or irrelevant (Rice, 2000). According to Brannon and Feist (2004), this may serve to either increase or decrease the perceived stress and the subsequent stress response. Reappraisal often results in the cognitive elimination of the perceived threat (Rice, 2000).

To sum up the three appraisals, primary appraisals evaluate perceived control of the situation and resources available to the individual. Secondary appraisals guide the use of specific coping strategies, whilst the effectiveness of these coping strategies determines the reappraisal, as well as the individual's psychological adjustment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Within the context of the present study, primary appraisal which is the first cognitive process is of particular interest. Primary appraisal is an assessment by an individual of whether an event, person, or object poses a potential threat (physical, psychological or social) to their well-being or does it, conversely, offer them a challenge which they can confront with some level of confidence and which may enhance their well-being. Like that of the benign-positive appraisal, the outcome of a stressful yet challenging appraisal of a situation is perceived as

holding potential for gain or growth, as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states (Sulsky & Smith, 2005).

3.3.3 Antecedents of Stress Appraisals

3.3.3.1 Individual differences

In addition to coping strategies, Lazarus and Eriksen (1952) found that individual differences are useful in explaining how stressors could produce different reactions. As Figure 2 depicts, the transactional model has the ability to accommodate the influence of individual differences in the appraisal process. Primary appraisal is the first cognitive process where individuals subjectively assess whether an event, situation, or demand is taxing or exceeding the person's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); this cognitive appraisal allows for the influence of individual differences, because the nature of what is considered stressful is individual-specific (Park & Folkman, 1997). According to Barling, Kelloway, and Frone (2005), individual differences that moderate the relationship between stressors and strains are hardiness, self-efficacy, locus of control, type A behaviour pattern, and emotional intelligence.

3.3.3.2 Situational demands

Situational demands refer to those characteristics of situations that make them potentially dangerous, harmful, challenging, or threatening. The most important situational factors include predictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, and timing (Dawood, 2007; Lazarus, 1991). For example, demands that are difficult, ambiguous, and uncertain are more likely to induce threat perceptions than easy tasks that can be accomplished under convenient pace and time conditions. However, personal factors by themselves are not sufficient to explain cognitive appraisal; they work interdependently with personal resources to determine the extent to which harm/loss, threat, or challenge will be experienced (Dawood, 2007).

3.3.3.3 Personal Resources

With respect to the relevance of perceived personal resources affecting cognitive appraisal, Lazarus (1991) and Dawood (2007) mention commitments and personal beliefs. Blumenthal et al. (2006) add that responses to stressors vary as a function of personality, beliefs, values, attitudes, support structures, goals, and experiences of the individual. Thus, the existence of work place stressors does not automatically and consistently result in strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The aforementioned discussion reflects how individual differences, situational demands, and personal resources influence both the reaction an individual has to a given situation or event and the outcome.

3.4 Studies using the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping.

Devonport, Biscomb, and Lane (2008) conducted a study to explore the sources of stress and coping strategies of Higher Education Lecturers. The results revealed that the significant differences in their response to stressors can be attributed to the process of cognitive appraisal.

In another study, O'Donnell, Lambert, and McCarthy (2008) found that individual teacher appraisals of their resources and demands seem to play a greater role in the stress response than do the environmental demands and resources that differ between schools. The results showed a 96.06% variance in elementary educator's stress responses within schools, and a 3.94% variance across schools.

3.5 Conclusion

The models presented in this chapter each contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of stress and well-being in different ways and, shows support for the use of the transactional model as the theoretical framework for this study. The transactional model sheds light on how complex and multidimensional the process of occupational stress really is. In addition, the transactional model depicts stress and well-being as a process that caters for individual differences, and that work demands have positive (eustress) outcomes and not just negative outcomes for individuals and organisations. The transactional model also recognises that situational factors as well as individual differences can impact on the experiences of occupational eustress or distress.

In the next chapter, the research design and method for this study is discussed. It is envisaged that this discussion will highlight and inform the reader of the manner in which the study will be approached and how the information collected from the participants will be analysed.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a description of the research methods adopted in the study is discussed below. This chapter includes the objectives of the study, research design, size and composition of the sample, gaining access, instruments utilised, data collection, data processing and data analysis. Reliability, validity and ethical considerations is also discussed.

4.2 Objectives of the Study

This research aimed to provide a qualitative account of police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement in the Dog Unit. The key objectives of the study were to conceptualise occupational stress and work engagement in the literature and to uncover Dog Handlers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement.

4.3 Research Methodology

4.3.1 Research Design

To achieve the above mentioned objective, this study used an empirical methodology located within a qualitative framework. Qualitative research methodology was followed as it allowed the researcher to uncover the meanings ascribed to the subjective experiences of Dog handler's to gauge their perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. Merriam (2009, p. 14) wrote this about the characteristics of qualitative research: "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive". As outlined by Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011), the purpose of qualitative

research is to understand or explain behaviour and beliefs, understand processes, and understand the context of participant's experiences. The objective of qualitative research is never to predict, but rather to describe and possibly explain events and experiences (Willig, 2008). Qualitative data collection and analysis is often more time-consuming and labour intensive, therefore qualitative researchers work with relatively small numbers of participants. In qualitative research, the researcher plays a pivotal role in the creation of knowledge, and influences and shapes the research process; therefore reflexivity must be considered Willig (2008).

The purpose of this study was to gather an in-depth understanding of Dog Handler's perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. The use of qualitative methodology also allowed the researcher to explore and capture the depth and richness of information that emerged as the interviews unfolded. In addition, this methodology was also suitable as it allowed the researcher to identify issues from the participant's perspective and provided an understanding of their perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement.

4.3.2 Sampling

The sample was gathered using a purposive non-probability sampling technique. A non-probability sampling technique means the samples are selected in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher. This sampling method was used because the participants that were sought possess specific characteristics that were necessary for the study (Welman & Kruger, 2001). This technique was used as a deliberate attempt to select

participants from a particular sector and the selection of these participants was dependent on the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). Due to the fact that the target population is relatively small ($n=50$), the use of non-probability sampling is acceptable as the goal is not to attempt to make generalisations from the sample being studied to the wider population of interest. Instead, following a qualitative research design, the researcher is interested in the intricacies of the sample. This type of sampling method was also chosen for the advantages of being more economical, less time consuming, and less complicated (Welman & Kruger, 2001).

4.3.3 Research Participants

The research participants of the present study consisted of police officer's employed as dog handlers at the SAPS Dog Unit, in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. A 'dog handler', in the case of this study, refers to a police officer stationed at the Dog Unit. A total of approximately 50 police officers are employed at the Dog Unit. Out of a targeted possible 50 participants, a non-probability purposive sample of 10 participants ($N=10$) were interviewed. The majority of the sample comprised of males ($n=7$) in relation to females ($n=3$); this is acceptable due to the fact that more males are generally employed as dog handlers as opposed to females. As seen in Table 1, the demographic data consisted of age, race, rank, and field of expertise. The age of the participants ranged from 28 to 50 years. The race of the participants included all four race groups, namely: (a) black, (b) white, (c) coloured, and (d) Indian. The sample comprised of four major ranks utilised in the SAPS including: (a) captains ($n=2$), (b) warrant officers ($n=4$), (c) sergeant ($n=1$), and (d) constables ($n=3$). Although all participants are dog handlers, a wide variety of specialist fields of expertise were represented in this sample including: (a) patrol dog handlers ($n=3$), (b) commander and dog handler ($n=2$), (c) explosives dog handler ($n=1$), (d) search and rescue dog handler ($n=1$), (e) biological body fluid detection dog handler ($n=1$), (f) commander and narcotics dog handler ($n=1$), and (g) patrol and

explosives dog handler ($n=1$). The number of year's participants had been in their current working role ranged from six years to 30 years.

The characteristics of the participants are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of Participants

Participants	Age	Race	Rank	Years of service	Field of expertise
One	33	White	Sergeant	10	Patrol dog handler
Two	45	White	Captain	26	Commander and dog handler
Three	41	Coloured	Warrant Officer	21	Explosives dog handler
Four	50	Indian	Captain	30	Commander and dog handler
Five	37	White	Warrant Officer	17	Search and rescue dog handler
Six	39	Indian	Warrant Officer	22	Biological body fluid detection dog handler
Seven	42	Black	Warrant Officer	18	Commander and narcotics dog handler
Eight	28	Coloured	Constable	7	Patrol dog handler
Nine	37	Black	Constable	6	Patrol and explosives dog handler
Ten	31	Black	Constable	8	Patrol dog handler

4.4 Measuring Instruments

A demographic questionnaire as well as an interview schedule was used in this study.

4.4.1 Demographic questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was developed by the researcher in order to gather demographic details of the participants of the present study. The demographic data collected consisted of age, race, rank, and field of expertise. The questionnaire did not request the names of participants, thus ensuring anonymity.

4.4.2 Interview schedule

An interview schedule was used as the primary instrument to elicit information about the participant's perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. The interview schedule was constructed using literature on occupational stress and particularly the definition advocated by Schaufeli et al. (2002) on work engagement which splits engagement into three dimensions: (a) vigour, (b) dedication, and (c) absorption. In this way, the researcher constructed questions to provide information on these constructs separately.

4.5 Data Collection Method

4.5.1 Semi structured interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C) with all the participants. Interviews was selected as the data collection method as the researcher needed to establish a rapport with the participants to gain access to detailed information regarding their perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. The researcher used a self-developed semi-structured interview schedule to elicit information through face to face interviews. Open-ended questions were used as a framework to guide the

interview process with each interviewee. As noted by Smith (2007) the advantage of semi-structured interview is that it facilitates rapport, it allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data. These advantages allowed the researcher to obtain a greater understanding of police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement.

In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews facilitated the use of probes to increase understanding of meaningful realities. As defined by (Hennink et al., 2011), probing is a technique used to gain further clarity, depth and detail from participant's responses. It can stimulate further discussion or focus the discussion to explore specific issues in depth. In-depth interviews are useful when detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours are needed or the researcher wants to explore new issues in depth (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

4.6 Procedure

All the participants in this study were accessible through the institution in which they worked, in this study, the South African Police Service. Thus, a gatekeeper was used to elicit verbal co-operation from the participants and to schedule appointments for interviews. Gatekeepers are people who have the power to grant or withhold access to the setting (Seidman, 2006). Thereafter, the researcher personally delivered a letter to all participants which outlined the purpose of the study. Each participant was assured that the research was completely confidential and anonymous so that they could give an honest account of their individual experiences. These issues of anonymity and confidentiality are discussed in greater detail in the ethics section at the end of this chapter. Due to the nature of police work i.e. working shifts, two interviews were scheduled per day over a period of one week. Therefore, dates

for the interviews were arranged with each participant. On the day of the interview, each participant was given an informed consent form (see Appendix B) which was explained to them. Each participant was given ample time to read and, sign the consent form which contained pertinent information about their rights as participants. Once the consent form was signed, an indication of the expected duration (approximately one hour) of the interview was also provided to each participant. The biographical questionnaire as mentioned above was used to gather information about the demographic characteristics of each participant. This questionnaire did not request the names of participants, thus ensuring anonymity.

All the interviews were conducted during October 2011 at the interviewee's place of work. An office at the Dog Unit situated in C R Swart Square, Durban was used as a convenient and confidential space free from disruptions and noise. Each interview lasted approximately twenty five to thirty five minutes and depended on the experiences of the participants. The researcher utilised a digital audio tape recorder to record data during the 10 interviews. Specific consent for tape-recording was included in the informed consent form that was signed prior to the interview. The disadvantage of using a tape recorder is that the participants may find the use of a voice recorder to be distracting, particularly in the early stages of the interview (Waltz, Strickland & Lenz, 2010). Furthermore, the use of a recording device is exacerbated by the increased time and cost involved in transcription (Waltz et al., 2010). However, the use of a tape recorder is a powerful tool for qualitative research. It not only ensures verbatim recording, but also allows the researcher to keep their full attention focused on the participants, to communicate that they are listening to what is being said and to probe into important cues (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

4.7 Data Analysis

In quantitative data analysis the focus is on numbers, however qualitative data analysis deals with meaning (Dey, 1993). The meaning participant's ascribed to occupational stress and work engagement were derived from the audio-taped and transcribed interviews of all participants. With the informed consent of all participants, each audio-taped interview was transcribed in writing before being transferred to a computer in order to facilitate the management of data. This transcribed record of the interview data was used for detailed in-depth analysis. According to Dey (1993), the core of qualitative data analysis lies in the process of describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how concepts interconnect. For this reason, thematic content analysis was employed to analyse the verbal material.

Thematic content analysis is described as a method of interpreting qualitative data through the 'systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes and patterns' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The method of analysing data using thematic content analysis is considered to achieve valid and reliable inferences because it involves the application of a set of systematic and transparent procedures for processing data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step six phase guide to conducting thematic analysis guided the thematic analysis in this research. Phase one began with familiarisation with data which included transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, and noting down initial ideas. Phase two involved generating initial codes which included coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and the collation of data relevant to each code. During phase three, the researcher searched for themes. This involved collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. At phase four, the researcher reviewed the themes. This included

checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set and generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis. During the fifth phase, the researcher defined and named themes. This involved on-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. Lastly, the researcher produced the report which is the final opportunity for analysis. This involved selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature and, producing a scholarly report of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the present study, the transcripts were repeatedly read before noting all the initial ideas. The interview data was then coded and data with the same codes were collated. The researcher then sorted the codes into identifiable themes which were then refined (i.e. some were combined) and some were re-named to suit the data accordingly. As soon as a data set was established, it was analysed by the researcher. It was then re-checked and amendments were made if necessary to ensure the themes, sub-themes and codes were an accurate reflection of the data set. Finally, the researcher verified the analysis and themes to ensure the credibility of the analysis and summary of the findings.

4.8 Reliability and Validity

With regard to the definitions of reliability and validity, different tests for qualitative research reveal new terms to be used appropriately for specific studies. For reliability, the synonyms include consistency, repeatability, and reproducibility (Bellamy, 2005), while for validity; the synonyms include truthfulness, accuracy, authenticity, genuineness, or soundness (Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem (2008). According to Willig (2008) reliability means that the same data when collected and analysed by different researchers, using the same method, ought to generate the

same results, irrespective of who carried out the research. Willig (2008) defines validity as the extent to which our research describes measures or explains what it aims to describe measure or explain. According to Smith (2007), qualitative researchers have developed a range of procedures that can be utilised to enhance the validity of their research. The procedures, such as triangulation; coding; participant feedback; disconfirming case analysis; and a paper trail will not be suitable for every qualitative research, but it does provide a toolbox from which a researcher can select a procedure to enhance validity. Qualitative research does not aim to measure a particular attribute in large numbers of people, but rather explores a particular, possibly unique, phenomenon or experience in great detail. It is for this reason, Willig (2008) states that qualitative researchers are less concerned with reliability.

4.9 Conclusion

This study adopted a qualitative research design and semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used. A purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to select the participants. A sample of ten participants, including seven males and three females were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data during face-to-face interviews. The procedure of data collection that was followed was elucidated. Finally, the procedure for using thematic content analysis to analyse interview data was described, as well as the reliability and validity pertaining to the present study.

The next chapter explores the participant's data in the form of identified themes. Where applicable, these themes are compared to the relevant literature as discussed in chapter two and chapter three of this study.

Chapter Five: Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an interpretation of the research findings is discussed based on the central themes and sub-themes extracted from the interview data. Where relevant, the identified themes are compared and integrated with the relevant literature as discussed in chapter two and chapter three of this study. Further, the purpose of this chapter is to integrate and compare the findings of the present study with previous scientific research findings, with particular reference to the theoretical framework underpinning the study, namely Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress.

The subject's articulation of their perceptions and experiences are reported verbatim where necessary to substantiate the various themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis. Within this research study, the 10 respondents herein will be referred to as participant one to participant 10. In the next section, the research questions are answered by extracting themes and sub-themes as identified by the researcher, using thematic content analysis. In addition, each theme will be concluded with previous findings to support or challenge the findings of this study.

5.2 Occupational Stress

5.2.1 What are Dog Handler's Perceptions of Occupational Stress?

Coding and analysis of the interview data generated two main themes with five sub-themes with regards to police officer's perceptions of occupational stress. The themes are presented in Table 2, and the findings are discussed more fully below.

Table 2

Research Questions, Themes, and Sub-Themes on Perceptions of Occupational Stress

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes
RQ1: What are dog handlers perceptions of occupational stress	Theme one: Individual differences	Beliefs Past experiences Attitude
	Theme two: Situational factors	Threatening situations Challenging situations

5.2.1.1 **Theme one: Individual differences.** Lazarus and Eriksen (1952) found that individual differences are useful in explaining how stressors could produce different reactions in people based on the cognitive appraisal of the event or situation. An appraisal of a stressor varies as a function of personality, beliefs, values, attitudes, support structures, goals, and experiences of the individual (Blumenthal et al., 2006). Thus, the existence of work place stressors does not automatically and consistently result in strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Sub-theme: Beliefs

The role of beliefs in the appraisal of a stressor was illustrated by participant nine as: “*I believe in myself. I know I have the capability to do what they can do, and may be even do it better.*” The participant believes that she is more than capable of handling the demands of the job; thereby adopting a positive approach.

A similar comment was made by participant eight: “...*I believe in myself. I will never let my partner down. I’ve been trained to be here. I’ve obviously proven that I’m capable of being a dog handler; otherwise I would’ve never been selected in the first place. So I have what it takes to be a dog handler.*” This participant strongly believes that she is capable of being a dog handler and I certain that she will not let her partner down. The P-E Fit Theory makes the explicit the importance of the degree to which an individual’s skills and abilities meet the demands required of them. The police officer’s perceive they have the ability to manage their work.

Sub-theme: Experiences of the individual

Whilst some individuals see a specific demand or stressor as a threat, others may see the same demand or stressor as a challenge or opportunity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The role of experience in the appraisal of a stressor was illustrated by participant six as: “*Stress is trying to create a balance between work and home, your social life, and never having enough money. Each of these situations has different demands that are not within your means. At work you might not have the resources to complete your job and at home you might not have a family who understands you. This creates stress....I have become so disillusioned*”. The experience of not being able to create a balance between work and home, not having enough money, and not having adequate resources to deal with work and home demands influenced the appraisal of the situation as stressful. Primary appraisal is the first cognitive process where individuals subjectively assess whether an event, situation, or demand is taxing or exceeding the person's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The participant’s situation was appraised as harm or loss as damage has already been done; participant reported feeling disillusioned.

In another example, participant three said that *“stress occurs when you’re placed in a situation that you have no control over...that you’re not happy with...resulting in a stressful environment because of the fact that you’re incapable of either at that point or at a later stage of handling such a predicament.”* Both participants suggest that stress arises from conditions that are beyond their control.

Sub-theme: Attitude

In situations which are not perceived as detrimental in any way, the primary appraisal is seen as irrelevant (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The attitude of the participants influences the appraisal of stressors. The role of attitude in the appraisal of a stressor was illustrated by participant five and participant seven. Both these participants adopted a positive attitude towards work and therefore appraised their situations as irrelevant. For example, participant five stated: *“I don’t think it personally as being stressful, no....That’s more of an adrenalin rush and more of an excitement thing, so that keeps you going. It’s not really stressful.”* In a similar example, participant seven articulated that *“Apart from bad management, there is no stress. A policemen’s job is exciting, it’s challenging. You get all worked up racing to the scene, your adrenalins pumping. This motivates you. You feel the pressure and most of us work better under pressure.”* If a police officer perceives an event as irrelevant, it is not stressful and therefore does not require coping (Anshel, 2000).

In a study of higher education lecturers, Devonport et al. (2008) found that significant differences in the response to stress can be attributed to the process of cognitive appraisal.

5.2.2.2 Theme two: Situational factors. The characteristics of situations that make them potentially dangerous, harmful, challenging, or threatening are regarded as situational

factors. The most important examples of situational factors include predictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, and timing (Dawood 2007). Anshel (2000) suggest that job-related stress of police officer's may be attributed to a combination of situational factors and poor coping skills, rather than the inherent nature of police work.

Sub-theme: Threatening situations

Participant two appraised his situation of being a manager as harmful. He is part of management, and although he doesn't agree with their decisions, he won't openly disagree with them for fear of risk to his well-being. This was articulated as: *"I'm part of management. I don't always agree with the decisions made by management. I don't always agree with the things going on in this unit in the sense that I'm a brick in the wall. I'm a part of the structure and the fact that I'm a captain means I have to stand by management's decisions. I can't go against their decisions openly."* A threat appraisal reflects the uncertainty of a situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this case, the participant was unsure about the ramification of going against the decisions made by management.

Similarly, participant six shared this sentiment. He added that *"You've been told time and again that you're just a number in the police...because of the vastness of this organisation...there's no personal care or personal supervision. You're basically told, listen, this is what's required of you and it's taken for granted that this is what you will do. If you don't comply, we will take steps against you."* A threat appraisal entails the anticipation of future harm (Lazarus, 1993). In this case the participant complies with what he is instructed to do, as he expects negative consequences for non-compliance.

Sub-theme: Challenging situations

Participant one appraised the tasks of police work as a challenge. She is aware that the nature of the job is demanding, but at the same time, she is confident in her ability to control and/or overcome the difficult demands. This was articulated as: *“I don’t think my job is stressful because of the fact that ...I was fully aware of the implications involved in doing this job and I was well equipped for the very same tasks.”* A challenge appraisal reflects a sense of anticipation, predictability, and control (Anshel, 2000). In this case, the participant is convinced that she has the ability to control and/or overcome the demands of police work.

Similarly, participant nine shared this sentiment. She added: *“I joined the SAPS aware of the dangers of the job. I suppose every police officer is afraid of getting shot, but you can’t live in fear of death. You got to be prepared for any type of situation. At the end of the day we are all here working towards the same mission, and that is to get as many suspects of the street, as we can....”* The appraisal of a situation as a challenge affords an individual the opportunity for potential gain or growth (Anshel, 2000). In this case, the participant made a challenge appraisal because she could foresee the potential gain; working as a police officer equips her to get suspects of the street. In addition, the participant is certain that she will be able to control and/or overcome any demand, because she has mentally prepared herself to deal with any situation.

In a study of 148 junior and middle level managers of a public sector consultancy organisation, Sharma and Singh (1991), found that the contribution of the situational factors in influencing employee commitment (91%) was 10 times as important as that of the personal factors (9%).

Furthermore, in a study on personal and situational variables that describe coping with acute stress in sport, Anshel and Wells (2000) found that challenge appraisal was associated with approach coping and threat appraisal was associated with avoidance coping in basketball players during stressful events in the game.

The personal and situational factors identified as influencing the appraisal process of the participants reinforces the views of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in that researchers must seek to identify and explore those personal and situational factors that mediate the appraisal of a stressor. Thus, in relation to the present study, these sub-themes have provided useful information in answering the research question on dog handler's perceptions of occupational stress. The use of the participant's excerpts together with the theoretical framework provided insight into understanding Dog Handlers perceptions of occupational stress.

5.2.2 What are dog handler's experiences of occupational stress?

Coding and analysis of the interview data generated one theme with three sub-themes with regards to police officer's experiences of occupational stress. The themes are presented in Table 3, and the findings are discussed more fully below.

5.2.2.1 Theme One: *Task-related stressors*

Sub-theme: Facing unpredictable and dangerous situations

Earlier research by Violanti and Aron (1994) reveal that occupational stressors emanate from the inherent dangers of police work. These authors mention that police officers are regularly involved with the most violent, antisocial, and mistrustful elements of society. The unpredictable nature of the external work environment, coupled with the looming danger, places considerable stress on police officers (Violanti & Aron, 1994). Participant two stated

Table 3

Research Questions, Themes, and Sub-Themes on Experiences of Occupational Stress

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes
RQ2: What are dog handlers experiences of occupational stress	Sources of experienced stress	<p>Task related stressors</p> <p>Facing unpredictable and dangerous situations</p> <p>Exposure to bodies</p> <p>Departmental investigations</p> <p>Afraid of being injured or killed</p> <p>Death of fellow officer on duty</p> <p>Organisational stressors</p> <p>Shift work and time pressures</p> <p>Role conflict</p> <p>Role overload</p> <p>Lack of organisational support</p> <p>Lack of family support</p> <p>Lack of voice in decision making</p> <p>Lack of opportunities for advancement</p> <p>Lack of adequate equipment and resources</p> <p>Personal stressors</p> <p>Work-home conflict</p>

that stress emanated from the imminent danger and risk of police work. This was articulated as: “...*stress often results from the danger of the job and the risks that we as police officers are subjected to on a daily basis*”.

In relation to Violanti and Aron's (1994) finding that occupational stressors emanate from the inherent dangers of police work, Dabney, Copes, Tewksbury, and Hawk-Tourtelot (2011) also found that occupational stressors emerge from the tasks and inherent dangers of police work. These authors found that police officers rank being in shoot-outs and high speed chases as the most stressful aspects of their jobs. Participant eight made the following comment regarding her concern about high speed car chases: "...You're driving to a complaint in progress with 260 on the speedometer....You don't know whether you going to meet with an accident or if you get there, whether you are going to be shot at." This uncertainty was also reiterated by participant 10, "You don't know whether you will come back home." Participant two made the following comment regarding his concern about shooting incidents: "I was shot and my dog was shot dead....It did give me a wakeup call...made me realise I'm not bullet proof like you always think you are...I was scared coming back to work...to go back into the bush... I'm wiser now and a bit more cautious". Participant seven was also involved in a shooting incident which he believes was an attempted assassination by people he had arrested. This was articulated as: "I've been shot several times. Luckily I haven't been injured. At one stage I was shot in the garage of my house...whenever I think about this, I still believe that the person was sent to assassinate me". In a study on police officers involved in shootings, Stratton, Parker, and Snibbe (1984) found that 30% of their police sample reported that a shooting incident affected them greatly.

Sub-theme: Exposure to bodies

When asked what they liked least about their job, participant five replied: "As a search and rescue dog handler, I'm often the first policeman at the scene...looking for missing people, missing babies...finding a dead body...that I'm prepared for, but explaining to the family...the family gets very emotional, that's the difficult part." In a similar vein, another

participant stated: *“The hardest thing for me is letting the family know that the child is dead.”* The researcher is of the assumption that participants appear to be inoculated against the exposure to dead bodies; contact with dead bodies has become a routine part of their job. Participants appear to be more affected by having to explain the death to one’s family.

In addition, participants mention that because of the continuous exposure, they have learnt to dehumanise themselves and treat the dead bodies as evidence. This was articulated by participant five as: *“...dealing with death can be very emotional but, I’ve been doing this for so long that I’ve learnt to turn myself off. You can’t be emotional in this type of environment....I say to myself if the person is dead, it’s evidence, there’s nothing more you can do for them, so I don’t stress in that sort of way”*. A similar sentiment was shared by participant two: *“In my 26 years as a Captain, I’ve seen some of the worst scenes, from rotten, stinking, decomposed to decapitated bodies, women who have been raped and murdered, bodies eaten by animals...this doesn’t stress me out...over the years, I’ve learnt to deal with it.”* Perhaps because death is such a routine part of the job for the participant’s, they do not perceive the exposure to dead bodies as being too stressful. However, the difficulty of dealing with the dead or missing person’s family was cited as stressful by many participants.

Sub-theme: Departmental investigations

As a disciplinary action, departmental investigations often ensues as a result of allegations of misconduct, excessive use of force, or other reasons (Stevens, 2005). Some of the participants expressed their frustration with departmental investigations. Participants two and four, who form part of the disciplinary committee, expressed their frustrations of having to investigate members with whom they still have to work with. They further stated that these

investigations should be done independently of the organisation. Participant four articulated this as: “...worst stress as a manager is investigating your own members....They’ll always expect you to be on their side... you forced to investigate the members...now we don’t see eye to eye because he believes I want to ‘nail’ him. Participant two said: “My suggestion is that members should be investigated externally... internal investigations are unnecessary and causes friction in the department...like if you have 10 members and you investigate five members, you already have five members who are negative and its possible that they might have their guns blazing at me.” Police officers may be frustrated with departmental investigations because of the perceived threat of losing one’s job or being prosecuted for a wrongful shooting (Stephens & Miller, 998). Departmental investigations of any nature is more than likely to affect any police officer, irrespective of whether they are innocent or guilty (McCreary et al., 2004). Participant seven said: “as police officer’s we are unsure whether or not to use force...when to use force or open fire...just when you think you can pat yourself on the back for a job well done...you get word that there’s an internal investigation against you.” This is often exacerbated by the lack of support from management (lack of support is addressed separately as a sub-theme). Stevens (2005) suggest that a fair disciplinary system with consistent leadership styles is necessary to moderate the effects of stress during departmental investigations.

Sub-theme: Afraid of being injured or killed

The fear of being ambushed was articulated by participant two as: “You walking blind in the bush...you could walk into an ambush.” The same participant was shot and injured during an ambush: “...I was shot and my dog was shot dead...I was scared coming back to work...to go back into the bush”. The participant expressed his fear of losing his life as he lay injured on

the ground. This was articulated as: “...lay there bleeding...the dog had run off...I had no idea he was shot...I just thought about them coming back to finish me off.”

Stephens and Miller (1998) points out that the more sudden and unexpected the occurrence of a stressor, the more likely it will adversely affect the police officer. The researcher assumes that police officers who are involved in “ambush” type shootings are more likely to appraise the situation as a threat; however, police officers involved in a “prepared assault” may appraise the situation as a challenge. Threat appraisals produce feelings of worry, anxiety, or fear (Brannon & Feist, 2004). In this case, the participant expressed feeling scared to come back to work, thus the fear of being injured or killed is appraised as a threat.

Sub-theme: Death of fellow officer on duty

The element of loss was also expressed by the participants. Participant two spoke about a hall of remembrance which included pictures of all those members they have lost over the years. He stated “if you look outside on the wall of remembrance, how many guys since 1988 have died, and you know what; I’ve been here through it all. I’ve lost a couple of friends, good friends, close friends, colleagues at this unit.”

Whilst the aforementioned task related stressors may be appraised as stressful, the participants reported that they are no longer affected by these stressors as they have been accepted as a routine part of their job. For example, participant two said: “...the element of danger, well I’m over that stress. I’ve passed that now, it’s become accepted as a routine part of my job....If I’m involved in a shooting today, I’m not going to go home tonight and drink a bottle of brandy. No, I don’t do that anymore. No, I’m an old hand in the game so I can deal with

that...the dangers and risks of the job but, what gets me more stressed is the organisational demands...especially when member's require resources and I can't produce." A study conducted by Hart et al. (1995) reported that police officers reported higher levels of psychological distress in relation to organisational hassles (such as administration and paperwork) compared to operational hassles (such as dealing with victims of crime or facing physical danger). Another example that mentions organisational stressors are more stressful than task-related stressors includes the following excerpt from participant five: *"...dealing with death can be very emotional but, I've been doing this for so long that I've learnt to turn myself off. You can't be emotional in this type of environment....I say to myself, if the person is dead, it's evidence, there's nothing more you can do for them, so I don't stress in that sort of way...I think it's management, lack of resources, there's no money for expensive equipment, no vehicles, those kind of things are far more stressful than dealing with dead bodies."* During the primary appraisal phase, coping is activated if the environment is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources and endangering his or her well-being. The abovementioned excerpts indicate that participants have learnt to cope with task-related stressors as these stressors are not appraised as taxing or exceeding their personal resources.

5.2.2.2 Theme two: Organisational stressors

Sub-theme: Shift work and time pressures

According to Waters and Ussery (2007), one of the obvious problems with choosing policing as a career is that it inevitably involves shift work. The invariable changing of shifts has serious health implications, such as: changing sleep patterns, digestive system circadian rhythms, and other bodily functions which affect the police officer's physical and psychological

well-being. The process of re-adjusting to shift change schedules in police work eventually exacts a toll on police officers (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

As dog handlers, some police officers are on call 24 hours a day. This means that regardless of whether they are on duty or not, when they receive a call, they have to drop everything and report immediately to the situation. This places immense stress on dog handlers, as they cannot plan personal and family functions, and are forced to limit the location of social events, allowing for timeous response to situations. The indecision and stress is illustrated well in the following quote from participant five: *“I don’t have the 4 days on and the 4 days off like the other guys...so I can’t really plan anything in advance because I don’t know where I’ll be.”* Echoing this sentiment, participant seven made the following statement: *“Working shifts is very demanding...you lose family time...social time...you don’t get to spend time with your children.”* Many jobs today require employees to work shifts, some of which go around the clock. Participant six expressed the inconvenience of working longer hours as: *“It happens all the time...I work longer hours...I don’t necessarily want to work these hours...not getting paid for it, but...the job carries on after the normal working hours.”* Another participant made the following comment: *“At times we have to stay at work and continue working till late hours of the night...go on standby so often...on standby on my phone all the time...you cannot leave your home and go visiting.”* Waters and Ussery (2007) agree that police officer’s experiences stress when working shifts because their normal family life is disrupted. Often, police officer’s working shifts sleep during the day and are mostly absent from special events (e.g. holidays and birthdays) because these events conflict with their shift schedule.

In 2003, Deschamps, Paganon-Badinier, Marchand, and Merle conducted a study on 617 metropolitan police officers to examine the association between policing, potential stressors

and stress levels. These authors found that shift work is an important factor associated with occupational stress. In addition they found that police officers with high stress levels could adversely affect one's social life by not having the opportunity to prepare or plan ahead for one's private life.

Sub-theme: Role conflict

Saiyadain (2003) asserts that if a person's role in an organisation is clearly defined and understood, and when expectations placed upon the individual are clear and non-conflicting, it is likely that stress can be minimised. However, in the policing environment, one of the most common problems that police officers experience is conflicting roles (Saiyadain, 2003). An excellent example of experiencing stress due to conflicting roles was provided by participant four: *"...I'm not a psychologist...forced to address my members personal problems...As a manger, I'm just trying my best to address the members' problem. He has this departmental case hanging over his head and, now I'm trying to discipline him for coming late to work."* In this case, the participant feels the pressure of playing a double role; that of acting as a manager and a psychologist.

According to Brown and Campbell (1994), police officer's are frequently forced to play double roles; that of a police officer trying to enforce the law and a social worker. Police officers respond to a number of calls on a daily basis which requires them to counsel either victims or family members, whilst at the same time they are expected to maintain law and order.

Another good example of role conflict was provided by participant six who plays many different roles; he is a man, a father, a husband, a friend in the social environment and a

colleague in the policing environment. These different roles have different expectations and the responsibilities of each of these roles are instrumental in affecting a person's level of stress. This was expressed as: *"...you cannot take the same personality you adopt at work; home...it's sometimes impossible to shut off when you're with other people....Like sometimes, I have to remind myself, hey, these are my kids, they not the guys at work...any little argument, my wife says, please don't bring your authoritative attitude from work into this house."*

Over three decades ago, Fry and Greenfeld (1980) studied role conflicts and gender relationships in police work. These authors argued that "commitment to the organisation and perceived levels of job-related stress, satisfaction, role conflict, and ambiguity are more a result of one's job in the organisation than one's sex" (p. 123).

Sub theme: Role overload

Role overload is considered to be a more important stressor for senior police officers in supervisory positions. Two participants who hold the rank of captain (senior officer) added that being an active dog handler as well as a shift commander placed an additional burden, of having too much to do. Participant two articulated this as *"coming to work and the resources are not there for guys to go and work and everybody is looking at me. Captain, what now? Captain, Captain, left, right and centre. That's stressful."* Participant four shared the same sentiments. He added: *"As a manager it's multitasking...the issue right now... it's not just fighting crime, it's so many other things that whether you like it or not, it has to be done...like be it resources...manpower...communication...meetings...operations at the stations...narcotic sweeps. So there are too many roles to play at the same time...this is*

the thing I hate most...right now, I'm rushing for a meeting. Before leaving I still have to make sure my members got their resources for the day".

In 1985, Gudjonsson and Adlam conducted a study of 112 senior British police officers. The results of the study revealed that senior police officers reported less stress than the lower ranking police officers but seemed more anxious about long hours and work overload.

Sub-theme: Lack of organisational support

The participants frequently mentioned the lack of organisational support as a cause of occupational stress. Participant five said: *"...I think the stresses and strains in the police come from management. I don't see the job itself as being stressful. I see the job itself as being rewarding...I'm just saying they not supporting us fully in the functions that we supposed to be doing."* Participant seven also spoke about the lack of organisational support. He said: *"Sometimes you get involved in situations where you end up feeling that you need the back up of your supervisors or management or somebody higher, but they are nowhere to be found."* Participant seven feels that the organisation does not support police officers in situations where petty or false allegations are brought against them by members of the public. Participant six made the following statement regarding lack of organisational support: *"The management is so bad that it is affecting everybody's performance. At no point in time will anyone come to you and hold your hand and say, listen I care about you."* A central issue that emerged from the interviews is that all the participants attributed their experiences of stress to lack of organisational support.

In Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress, the individual and the environment are seen as being in a dynamic, reciprocal and bi-directional interaction with

mutual influences. The outcome of this process can be either positive or negative. Stevens (2005) is of the opinion that the perception a police officer has about his or her working environment may have a negative influence on the way the police officer interacts within such an environment. So if a police officer perceives his or her environment as dangerous and not having support from management or colleagues, it can be stressful. On the contrary, if a police officer perceives his or her environment as dangerous, but has support, it may be less stressful.

Participants also mentioned lack of recognition and the prevalence of perceived favouritism as sources of stress. Lack of recognition was articulated by participant three as *“I think we don’t get the necessary recognition for the good work that we do.”* Perceived favouritism was expressed by participant six who stated *“...so some people get equipment and recognition from management whilst others don’t.”*

Gulle et al. (1998) conducted a study of 91 SAPS members in the Cape Peninsula. Their study showed that lack of supervisory and management support contributed to stress. Similarly, the participants of this study indicate that lack of supervisory and management support contributes to stress.

Sub-theme: Lack of family support

There were also negative experiences relating to social support. Participant six stated that apart from experiencing stress at work, he was also subjected to stress to home. He said: *“You’ve had so much to deal with at the office...you’re extremely tired, and when you get home you’re still expected to perform sexually and satisfy your wife’s needs. And if you can’t, it’s a huge problem. Most of the time she doesn’t want to listen to excuses and we end*

up arguing.” Participant eight also attributed experiencing stress due to a lack of support from her spouse. This was expressed as: *“My husband also doesn’t make it easy. He’s always moaning about me working late, not resting enough. How can I have a baby if I’m putting my job first?”* Thus, the family can also serve as a major stressor.

A study conducted by Maynard, Maynard, McCubbin, and Shoa (1980) revealed that occupational stress experienced by policemen leads to distress among their wives. In this study, the participants related the lack of family support as contributing to their experience of stress.

Sub-theme: Lack of voice in decision making

Slate, Wells, and Johnson (2003) maintain that individuals who contribute to decision making that directly impacts them on a daily basis in the workplace tend to be less stressed than employees who want to provide input in the decision-making process, but are not afforded the opportunity to do so. Participant six was highly frustrated by the lack of opportunity to participate in decision making. He commented: *“...you get people in management positions without a matric and these are the people making the decisions that impact on our lives. As a warrant officer I’m never given the opportunity to make a decision, never. I have the training, I have the knowledge, and I have 22 years of experience in the SAPS. I have two degrees. What does this all account for? Nothing.”*

Zhao, He, and Lovrich (2002) conducted a study to explore the effect of individual perceptions of work environment on male police officer stress. The study findings revealed that the higher the level of education police officers possessed, the more likely they were to experience stress due to the bureaucratic constraints of the organisation. The means that, the

more highly educated police officers are more likely to have a burning desire to offer input into decision making in the workplace that affects them and are more likely to be frustrated by a lack of opportunity to do so.

Sub-theme: Lack of opportunities for advancement

Career development for police officers includes the department providing those officers who have been with the department for a period of time, with career opportunities or alternatives for advancement. This aspect of personnel administration is imperative in maintaining morale and job satisfaction within the department. Majority of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the existing promotional policies and cited lack of opportunities for advancement and promotions as the contributing factor to their experiences of stress.

Participant six expressed his frustration at having reached his career ceiling and knowing that he will never be promoted as: *“I’ve been here for so many years doing the same thing day in and day out. It’s the same environment, in the same job. I’ve reached my limit. There’s nothing else that the organisation has to offer me. I’m at a sort of dead end where I know there’s no hope for promotion. Now I have to take someone else and mentor them and let them continue. There’s just no more scope. I’ve been adequately trained. I believe I’m an expert in my field, so what more can the organisation offer me.”* Participant nine commented on how existing promotion policies create friction between employees: *“Promotions are the other issue...we all apply for the same posts...so many constables applying for the same job, it creates a lot of competition and friction among the members.”* Participant one said: *“...lack of acknowledgment and, advancement in your work... promotion wise, to advance in your work...is very limited...rank structure isn’t that broad...all the posts for ranks going*

upwards are already filled...the only way to advance is leaving the dog unit which I'm not willing to do."

According to Kirkcaldy, Brown, and Cooper (1998), in organisations with strict internal hierarchies, such as the policing environment, police officers generally have a strong desire to achieve promotion. However, despite meeting appropriate criteria, few police officers actually get the opportunity to achieve a higher position. The inability to realise one's personal ambitions and career goals due to organisational constraints can turn into a source of stress (Kirkcaldy et al., 1998). In relation to this study, the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the existing promotional policies and cited lack of opportunities for advancement and promotions as the contributing factor to their experiences of stress.

Sub-theme: Lack of resources

The work situation might be extremely stressful if there exists a high demand for performance and service delivery and the resources to prevent, solve, or investigate crime is inadequate. Thus, the lack of adequate resources can lead to stress among police officers who are reliant on such devices to perform their job. Participant two described the enormous difficulty in trying to combat crime and conduct routine patrols without motor vehicles: *"You get here, the vehicles aren't running properly."* Participant five said: *"...I'm expected to report for duty on time and expected to go out and perform my duties....Suppose my vehicle is in the garage...I wouldn't have a vehicle...get a call for assistance...I'm eager to go..., but there's no vehicle. When there are vehicles, they not in proper working condition. Now that's a huge sort of frustration for me."* Participant four said: *"...don't have resources to do your work...like cars that are in good running condition...sometimes have cars, but they are*

inadequate to manage the task...drive fast, you drive hard, so the cars should have the necessary breaking standards specified by the manufacturer. Now you cannot drive a 1.3 litre car at 150km/h and expect it to break on time or even meet the speed of the car the suspects are getting away in.” The above mentioned sentiments indicates that the participants adverse working conditions are further compounded by sub-standard equipment and facilities, thus creating potentially harmful situations and a sense of inconvenience and uncaring from management.

Hart et al. (1995) argue that, consistent with research literature suggesting that organisational factors are the main factors contributing to stress experiences in police officers, “organisational, rather than operational, experiences are more important in determining the psychological well-being” (p.147).

5.2.2.3 Theme three: Personal stressors

Sub-theme: Work-home conflict

The participants expressed that the delicate balance of work and home is a tightrope that many find difficult to walk. As a consequence of having a high workload, police officers typically work longer hours. This is likely to reduce the time and energy they can invest in their personal life and may lead to conflict between work and home demands. This was articulated by participant eight as: *“I’m trying to have a baby and I don’t see how I can do that whilst working shifts...My husband also doesn’t make it easy. He’s always moaning about me working late, not resting enough. How can I have a baby if I’m putting my job first?”*

According to Morash and Haarr (1995), striking a harmonious balance between the traditionally male dominated policing atmosphere and personal responsibilities at home can be extremely problematic and stressful.

Surprisingly, male police officers in the Dog Unit also expressed difficulty in balancing a strike between work and home responsibilities. Some of the participants stated that their work stressors had a spill-over effect into their personal lives, which affected their relationships. Participant six articulated this as follows: “...or you so tired from working a 12 hour day that you cannot see to the needs of your family. You’re highly frustrated and you extremely exhausted by the time you go home. So you can’t do the household chores. This creates more problems, and then you can’t assist your children with their homework because you just want to be left alone...I often end up screaming at my children for no reason.... Then I’m still expected to come to work the next day and work another 12 hour day...you faced with angry complainants that you don’t want to deal with.” This participant found himself locked in a reciprocating situation, where his job created stress, which he brought home and exacted on his children, thereby creating more stress which he took back to the work environment.

A study by Demerouti and Geurts (2003) indicated that a high proportion of employed people, particularly parents have difficulty in combining the work domain with domestic obligations. Similarly, the participants of this study indicate that striking a harmonious balance between personal responsibilities at home and the work domain is extremely problematic and stressful.

Participant two also spoke about how work related stressors compound and aggravate stress at home and on the job. He said: “...also you have an obligation at home...you got a wife...and you got your kids waiting for you. I was shot before...it had a worse impact on my family than it had on me. The trauma that I put them through of being shot was worse than me being shot myself...every time you go to work after that, it’s daddy like be careful, and babe, you know, look after yourself. Come home. Don’t be stupid. Don’t go in the bush if

you don't have to.” On that particular day, neither participant two, nor his wife and children were aware of the imminent danger he was about to face. The shooting incident has changed their lives forever; the family has become more anxious every time the police officer leaves home and he has become more cautious.

According to Waters and Ussery (2007) most police families live in constant fear. The police officer's spouse and children often worry about the danger that the police officer faces on a daily basis. This growing fear emanates from the fact that they don't know what will happen when the police officer leaves home; neither does the officer.

5.2 Work Engagement

5.3.1 What are dog handler's perceptions of work engagement?

Research indicates that although police officers experience stress, some police officers are able to give off their best, willing to go the extra mile, and persist even in the face of difficulties. Moreover, some individuals function well under significant stress (Storm & Rothmann, 2003). The researcher assumes that the reason individuals choose policing as a profession might be useful in explaining why they remain engaged in their work.

Table 4

Research Questions, Themes, and Sub-Themes on Perceptions of Work Engagement

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes
RQ3: What are dog handlers perceptions of occupational stress	Theme one: meaningful work	Inner calling An active choice to become a police officer Serve and protect Sense of duty Recognition To form an identity

5.3.1.1 Theme one: Meaningful work

Sub-theme: Inner Calling

Kahn (1990) advocated that meaningfulness is a psychological pre-condition for engagement. People who experience meaningfulness engage fully in their jobs; they feel as if their work is important and valued, and “as though they made a difference and were not taken for granted” (Kahn, p. 704). Participant 10 stated that work is not a mechanism to gain financial resources; being a police officer was an inner calling. This was articulated as: “*it’s not about the money...I became a policeman because of an inner calling.*” The meaning of work refers to what work signifies to an individual. Meaning can be broadly defined as the perceived value of the task or goal and a sense of personal connection to work (Stander & Rothmann, 2010).

Sub-theme: An active choice to become a police officer

Still other participants mentioned that it was a positive career choice to become a police officer, and more specifically to work in the Dog Unit. Several of the participants who had more than 10 years service in the SAPS, indicated that they wished to remain with the organisation and had no intention to leave. Participant two articulated this as: “*My job is basically my life. Being a policeman is something I’ve always wanted to do. It’s all I know;*

it's everything to me... despite all the pressure that comes with this job, you know. I know things can't change...I've been with the organisation for 26 years now...I won't leave until retirement. I'm here to stay." Participant three shared the same sentiments: *"Well, basically my job means everything to me. It's who I am. It's all I've known from the time I completed my schooling. It's a career choice I'll never change."* When applied to the context of this study, the dimension of dedication discussed in chapter two is relevant as the participant's reflect the importance of police work in their lives and how they derive a sense of significance and are proud to be police officers.

Sub-theme: Serve and protect

Unlike other professions, police officers are often confronted with extremely stressful and demanding situations (Gulle et al., 1998). Still many people pursue a career as a police officer. The participants stated that they were aware of the imminent danger associated with being a dog handler, as well as the long hours, and heavy physical work. However, the participants stated that they became police officers because they like to serve the country in a positive way. Participant one said: *"It's about serving people and helping people."*

Participant five also spoke about serving and protecting the people: *"Well, it means helping and protecting the people outside. I don't believe I'm working for the state or for anyone else. I believe I'm working for the people."* According to Toch (2002), police officers choose policing as a career because they face the necessity to respect the integrity and individuality of others while trying to enforce the law. This is the conflict police officers face in their mission to protect and serve the community, trying both to protect and to serve the community simultaneously. Although, protecting and serving has been documented as a reason for experiencing stress within policing, the participants perceived protecting and

serving as their personal responsibility, thus giving meaning to their job as police officers.

This served as a foundation for engagement.

Sub-theme: Sense of duty

For another participant, it was not only a desire to help others, but a sense of duty that her career should be one that helps people of the community. A female participant commented that even as a child she had always known that she wanted to be a police officer. Whilst growing up she was aware of the seriousness and impact of crime on people who were close to her. Being the only person with an education, she joined the SAPS with the intention to get the criminals of street. This was articulated as: *“Even as a child, I’ve always known that I wanted to be a policewoman and I’ve fought hard to be here. People all around me have been affected in some way or the other by crime. Now that I’m in the SAPS I feel it is my responsibility to get the thugs of the street.”* This participant demonstrated a personal connection to work, as she witnessed crime when she was younger, and saw firsthand how crime affects families and communities, and through this connection she felt a desire to work towards eradicating crime. This indicates that the participant is intrinsically motivated and therefore thrives at work. According to May et al. (2004), it is important for employees to bring their physical, emotional and cognitive resources when they engage themselves in their work roles.

Sub-theme: Recognition

For participant seven, more than serving and protecting and the desire to help others, he joined the SAPS because he was always looked up to in life by people in the community. He was

always admired and respected for being able to help others with their problems. Becoming a policeman gave him the opportunity to continue this in his adult working life. This was articulated as: *“...I’ve always been looked up to, where I stay. I’m admired and respected for always being able to help others with their problems. Becoming a policeman has given me the chance to continue this in my adult working life. Even when I’ off duty, I’m actually on duty, be it at work, at my house, people come for help all the time. They come to tell me their problems. If they need transport I use my personal car. I have shot hijackers using my personal car. When I see something happening, I can’t resist. I have to help. Even when I’m off duty, or whilst going to buy the paper, I will arrest someone and I end up coming here to do the paper work...I always think of myself as being on duty twenty four hours a day.”*

Personal resources are positive self-evaluations that foster resiliency to set backs and refer to an individual’s sense of their ability to successfully control and impact their environment.

Sub-theme: To form an identity

May et al. (2004) suggests that work roles that are aligned with individual’s self-concept should be associated with a more meaningful work experience. In addition May et al. (2004) suggests that individuals may derive meaning from social identities they receive from salient group memberships. Two participants mention that they joined the Dog Unit because it is highly prestigious. Participant four said: *“If you love dogs and hate crime, joining the Dog Unit is an excellent choice...it’s a specialised unit for ‘cops’ who have a good reputation for being hard working.”* Another participant made the following comment in this regard: *“Once you’ve been selected to join the Dog Unit there is a personal satisfaction in knowing that you are part of an elite group.”*

In this study, it is evident that participants derived meaning from their work, which served as a buffer against the stressful work environment. The studies of May et al. (2004) and Olivier and Rothmann (2008) confirm that psychological meaningfulness is a strong predictor of employee engagement. In addition, Britt et al. (2001) found that engagement in meaningful work can lead to perceived benefits from the work. Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their job (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The restoration of meaning in work is seen as a method to foster an employee's motivation and attachment to work, thus resulting in engagement (May et al., 2004; Nelson & Simmons, 2003; Olivier & Rothman, 2008).

5.3.2. What are dog handler's experiences of work engagement?

Table 5

Research Questions, Themes, and Sub-Themes on Experiences of Work Engagement

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes
RQ4: What are dog handlers experiences of work engagement	Theme one: Resources positively influencing work engagement	Social support Skills and abilities Peer support Self-efficacy Work is significant Work is inspiring and challenging Being completely immersed in one's job

5.3.2.1 Theme one: *Resources positively influencing work engagement*

The data collected from the interviews outlined a number of factors that were regarded as having a positive influence on participant's work engagement. This theme has been broken down into several sub-themes as follows:

Sub-theme: Social support

Two participants stated that although they experienced work related stressors, the support from their families helps reduce the impact of stress and serves as a buffer against organisational demands. Participant four articulated how the support of his family served to mediate the impact of work stress: *"...my family supports me hundred percent. I've been here for thirty years...never a day my wife complained about me working till late...going on a course...she's never complained...this makes it easier for me to focus on my job. She's never made me feel guilty for not spending time with her and the kids. If I call her during the day and say I've had a bad day or a stressful day at work...she's always ready to listen....makes it easier to wake up the next morning and go to work... I feel a lot more relaxed....Having my family support me is a real bonus. I'm able to easily forget about the stress of the previous day."* In a similar vein, participant seven spoke about the support from his family. He said: *"...my children and my wife know how passionate I am about my work. I take work home all the time. I even see complainants from my house. So, they give me the support I need. My wife especially is behind me 100 percent. My wife understands."* As can be seen from these excerpts, the family can be a major source of stress as mentioned in the previous section; they can also serve as a buffer against stress (Brannon & Feist, 2004).

Kirkcaldy et al. (1998) state that being married and having children are two important factors helping to reduce the level of stress. Both factors also lead to increased job satisfaction.

Furthermore, these authors propose that "marriage and children may help to put the job of

policing into some kind of perspective, providing the social support to cope with the job demands” (p. 98).

Sub-theme: Skills and abilities

The participants reported being specialists in their fields and having the skills and abilities that match the requirements of the job. For example, participant five who is the only search and rescue dog handler said: “...*I feel indebted to the SAPS for the specialised training I received...seventeen years of on-the-job experience...I am equipped to handle any situation. That’s the reason I put in the extra effort to get the job done....I’ve also been trained as a paramedic so in that aspect as well. I’m trained to deal with victims who are injured.*”

Participant one said: “...*as a dog handler, you’re normally at the forefront of crime...I’m not afraid of attending any scene because I believe I have the necessary skills...we’re trained...you cannot be a dog handler if you haven’t already shown you’re capable of handling these situations. You well trained. You can handle yourself. You can handle the situation.*”

According to participant two, police officers need to fulfill certain criteria even before applying to join the Dog Unit. This was articulated as: “*There is a strict selection procedure....The training is extensive and includes detection of narcotics, explosives, and electronic devices. You learn patrol protocol, including how to track suspects, release the dog, call for backup, exchange your leash for a weapon, and bring the dog to heel after apprehension...apart from the police diploma...this training is an additional qualification.*”

According to the PE Fit Theory, stress arises when there is a mismatch between a person and the environment (Edwards et al., 1998). Thus, a police officer may experience stress as a result of the misfit between his or her skills and abilities and work demand. In the event of a

match between the person and the environment, it is likely that stress will not be experienced. In this study, the participants indicated that due to the strict selection procedures and extensive training they undergo, there is a person-environment fit which reduces the experience of stress.

Sub-theme: Peer support

The support participant's receive from colleagues in the Dog Unit seem to be the most satisfying aspect of their role as a dog handler. They enjoy working together and experience real camaraderie. Participant two said: "*...I'm part of management...I prefer working outside with my boys...that's where I build relationships with the guys, not here in the office where I have to discipline them. When you out there on the field, everyone is working together towards the same goal...*" Participant seven said: "*...we watch out for each other....We don't get support from management, so we rally around each other for strength and support...*" Participant nine said: "*Working alongside men in a male dominated work environment, knowing that they always got my back...*" Gaining peer support and trust of co-workers and supervisors is important in buffering the effects of stress related to police work.

Graf (1986) argued that peer support is essentially salient to police officers because of the nature of their work, which requires them to place their lives in the hands of fellow police officers in dangerous situations.

Previous cross-sectional studies (Hakanen et al., 2006; Saks, 2006) have shown that several job resources like autonomy, social support, supervisory coaching, performance feedback, and opportunities for professional development related positively to work engagement. This study also reflects that peer support is positively related to work engagement.

Sub-theme: Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to a person's ability to produce certain actions and belief that they are able to perform the task or cope with stress (Tosi, Mero, & Rizzo, 2000). The participant's extensive training, coupled with their experience as dog handlers has served to enhance their ability to deal with the stressful situations. In addition, participants mentioned that although they were aware of the dangers and stressors related to police work, they were capable of dealing with such situations. Participant five articulated this as: *"...I've been through most of the disciplines with the dogs in the unit. I've been a patrol dog handler, an explosives dog handlers and now I'm a search and rescue dog handler...I'm an engaged person, I'm a specialist in my field. There's no way that I can come to work and not be connected to the work I do."* Participant three said: *"...I have the training, I have the knowledge, and I have 22 years of experience in the SAPS. I have two degrees."*

According to Hsieh, Chen, Lee, and Kao (2012), policing is a highly professional and specialised job. The professionalism acquired from training would strengthen officer's confidence about their own competence of task achievement. In addition, remaining in a highly skilled, competent group might also boost one's self-efficacy. The great level of self-efficacy thus encourages them to engage in performance for their work.

According to Toch (2002), an officer's self-efficacy plays a large role in their subjective experience of stress. Due to the infinite number of situations an officer can encounter, it is unlikely that an officer will feel prepared in every situation. Participant two mentioned that he was able to recover quickly, despite being shot: *I was shot and my dog was shot dead....It did give me a wakeup call...made me realise I'm not bullet proof like you always think you are...I*

was scared coming back to work...to go back into the bush... I'm wiser now and a bit more cautious”.

A recent study by Mauno et al. (2007) argue that positive self-evaluations such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, support individuals in successfully coping with job demands and associated physiological and psychological costs, achieving work goals, and pursuing pathways for personal growth and development.

Theme two: Positive appraisals of work situations

According to Nelson and Simmons (2003), eustress reflects the extent to which cognitive appraisal of the situation is seen to either benefit or enhance an individual's well-being. These authors define eustress as a positive psychological response to a stressor as indicated by the presence of positive psychological states (e.g. vigour and dedication). This means that the participants had a positive cognitive response to stress.

Sub-theme: Work is significant

The participants said they derive a sense of significance from their work. Anshel (2000) mention that it is difficult to imagine police officers deriving a sense of achievement and accomplishment in a job that is described as one of society's most stressful occupations. Participant five said: *“...as a search and rescue...remarkable experience to find missing people, especially children...job affords me the opportunity to make a positive difference in someone's life.”* Another participant said: *“...the ability to make a difference in somebody's life...to save people from being shot or killed.* Participant two said: *“....There's nothing better than actually doing some good and making a difference in someone's life. That feeling of gratitude that you get from the people you help, whether it is from recovering*

a cell phone to recovering a vehicle, to stopping an armed robbery to arresting someone for whatever. There's always fulfillment"

Sub-theme: Work is inspiring and challenging

The participants said they derive a sense of inspiration and challenge from their work.

Participant three said: *"The SAPS means everything in the world to me; this organisation and its mission inspires me to do my job as police officer...inspires me to come to work because everyday is a new day...today I might do something I've never done before."*

Participant three made this comment when asked whether he thought his job was challenging:

"...my work is challenging, it doesn't take an ordinary person to do this job. It takes a special kind of person with the right personality and physical and mental strength to be a dog handler. That's why the selection standards are so high." Participant eight said: *"I love being a dog handler and I wouldn't change it for anything. Working with police dogs is fun, it's rewarding and exciting."* She further said that she found her job challenging. This was articulated as: *"...everyday you wear a new hat...you never know what to expect. One minute you're helping a baby breathe, the next minute you're dealing with a guy with a gun, the next minute a kid is asking you for assistance, 10 minutes later you could be chasing suspects for armed robbery...every shift throws you different challenges."* Roberts and

Devonport (2002) maintain that engaged employee's report that their jobs make good use of their skills and abilities, are challenging, and stimulating, and provide them with a sense of personal accomplishment.

Boverie and Kroth (2001) suggest the importance of building work environments that are humane, challenging and rewarding where people are passionate and energised about their

work. The SAPS can be regarded as one such organisation. The participants mentioned that to become a dog handler, a police officer had to undergo a series of fitness and psychometric evaluations. Thus, being selected as a dog handler, reflects some sort of congruence between the individual and the environment (the dog unit). Therefore, an individual would be more dedicated to the position. This would also be true in cases where the employee relates to the job or experiences a sense of self within the roles of the position, as reflected by the participants. By experiencing a fit, the participants experienced greater satisfaction with the job and had greater enthusiasm about being a dog handler and felt that their work is full of meaning and purpose.

Sub-theme: Being completely immersed in one's job

During the interview, the participants were asked to talk about a time when they were so engrossed in their work that they completely lost track of time. All the participants reported being engaged in some or other duty that they often forget that the shift had ended. Two comments are included, for example, participant two said: *"...it often happens. Like, say I arrested a guy at 4 in the morning so the suspect has to be taken to the charge office to open up a case, and if he's injured during the arrest he has to be taken to the hospital. By the time you've finished up, you no, you look at the time and the time is gone. The next shift is already up and running. So yes, I do, I often become so wrapped up in getting the suspect off the street that nothing else seems to matter."* Participant three said: *"I can recall many incidents where I worked around-the-clock without even realising that I've been on a shift for almost twenty four hours without sleep. One particular incident does stand out in my mind. We were pursuing a suspect that was wanted on seventy eight counts of rape. He was also wanted for shooting 4 policemen....We got a tip off...got to the area and the suspect opened fire. We exchanged fire and the suspect was eliminated at the scene...wait for the duty*

officer, the media, my commander...it takes hours....This was my most rewarding arrest, well not arrest because the guy was shot dead, but I mean, can you imagine what it feels like to get a 'cop killer' off the street?." These situations were appraised as benign-positive as the outcome of the transaction was perceived as positive (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The police officers were not bothered about working longer hours, so long as they achieved their goal which was to get the suspects off the street. This type of appraisal is characterised by positive psychological states such as: happiness and exhilaration (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sulsky & Smith, 2005).

Participant two reported being happy: *"For me personally, I am happy working the longer hours...especially if you've made a good arrest."* Participant three said: *"...the excitement you get when you and your dog are chasing the suspect. You have no care in world, you wouldn't understand. It's such a sense of adrenalin rush. You got your gun in one hand, your dog in the other hand and you going. You looking...finding the suspect and bringing him to justice...that's the ultimate reward."* The participant's statements reflect that they totally immerse themselves in their work. Absorption is characterised by being fully immersed, concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one forgets about everything else that is around and is reluctant to detach oneself from work (Burke & El-Kot, 2010). Kahn (1990) define personal engagement in one's job as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles" (p. 694). Engaging the self in one's work should lead the individual to focus on aspects of his or her job, rather than focusing on stressful circumstances that are occurring outside the sphere of the individual's immediate work performance (Kahn, 1990).

According to Britt and Bliese (2003), if a police officer is personally engaged at work, he or she should become absorbed in the task at hand and will be less likely to be bothered by having

to work longer hours. Absorption would therefore have the net effect of buffering the individual from the negative consequences of work demands, such as working longer hours.

5.4 Conclusion

The chapter discussed the results of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted to provide access into the subject's world and provide insight into their perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. An interpretation of the research findings were discussed based on the themes and sub-themes extracted from the participant's perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement. Where relevant, the identified themes were compared and integrated with the relevant literature. The subject's articulation of their perceptions and experiences were reported verbatim where necessary to substantiate the various themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis.

In the following chapter the conclusions about the studies findings are made. The limitations of the study are also discussed, and recommendations for future research are highlighted.

Chapter Six: Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The results of this study were detailed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, an overview of the findings of the study, together with the conclusion of the results and integration with previous research is presented. Finally, a discussion of the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research is highlighted.

6.2 Conclusions

Conclusions are made in the following paragraphs in accordance with the research objectives and empirical findings obtained within the present study.

6.2.1 Conclusions in terms of the Conceptualisation of Occupational Stress and Work Engagement

6.2.1.1 Occupational stress

For the purpose of this research, occupational stress was conceptualised as an imbalance between an individual's perceived demands and their perceived ability to deal with these demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Sarafino (2006), occupational stress consists of a physical and a psychological component, which can be examined from three fundamentally different approaches, namely: (a) stimulus-based or engineering approach (b) the response based or medico-psychological approach, and (c) the process-based or psychological approach. These approaches were discussed in detail to show the complexity of the stress phenomenon.

In order to further understand the stress process and its complexities, the antecedents of stress was discussed. Drawing primarily from the research of Maslach-Pines and Keinan (2006), the most common sources of occupational stress expected to have a measure of impact on work engagement in the police organisation are grouped into four main categories, namely: (a) task related stressors, (b) organisational stressors, (c) external stressors, and (d) personal stressors.

Previous research conducted in the SAPS indicates that police officers face various stressors in the organisation (Collins & Gibbs, 2003; Shane, 2010; Gulle et al., 1998; Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006). As a result of these stressors, once enthusiastic police officers can become detached from their work, fatigued, and cynical (Lynch, 2007). However, some individuals, regardless of the high job demands and long working hours, show no symptoms of burnout (Naude & Rothmann, 2006). In contrast, they appear to find pleasure in working hard and dealing with these stressors (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Such individuals are engaged in their work (May et al., 2004).

6.2.1.2 Work engagement

For the purpose of this research, work engagement was conceptualised as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). The researcher considered all three dimensions as significant elements that contribute to the participants engaging themselves in their work roles.

Job resources were considered important antecedents of work engagement. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) found a positive relationship between job resources and work engagement. In addition to job resources, Chughtai and Buckley (2008) show that personal resources were positively related to work engagement. Kirkpatrick (2007) argued that empirical studies

revealed that work engagement is associated with various positive attitudes for both employees and the organisation. Previous studies conducted within the SAPS provide evidence supporting the relationship between positive perceptions of stress and work engagement, in that, despite the stressful nature of police work, employees report being actively engaged in their work.

The aforementioned concludes the research objective regarding the conceptualisation of occupational stress and work engagement. Next the conclusions for perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement will be discussed.

6.2.2 Conclusions in terms of the Perceptions of Occupational Stress

The results discussed in the previous chapter reflect that participant's responses to stress vary as a function of individual differences and situational factors. With regard to individual differences, beliefs, attitudes, and past experiences were identified as important factors influencing the participant's perceptions of occupational stress. With regard to situational factors, stressors were appraised as threatening and challenging. The existence of work place stressors did not automatically and consistently result in strain for all the participants.

Consistent with previous findings that people react to stress differently (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005), this study found that the participants appraised stressors differently on the basis of their cognitive appraisal of the situation or event. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue, whilst some individuals see a specific demand or stressors as a threat, other individuals see the same demand or stressor as a challenge or opportunity. In relation to Lazarus and Folkman's argument, this study also found that whilst some participants appraised work stressors as a threat, other participants appraised the stressor as a challenge. The results indicate that

personal factors such as beliefs, attitudes, past experiences, and situational factors influenced participant's perceptions of occupational stress. Similar findings were found in a study conducted by Sharma and Singh (1991). The quantitative study of 148 junior and middle level managers of a public sector consultancy organisation revealed that the contribution of situational factors in influencing employee commitment (91%) was 10 times as important as that of the personal factors (9%).

6.2.3 Conclusions in terms of the Experiences of Occupational Stress

The results indicate that participants experienced task-related stressors, organisational stressors, and personal stressors. The first theme addressed task-related stressors which included: facing unpredictable and dangerous situations, exposure to bodies, departmental investigations, fear of being injured or killed, and death of a fellow police officer. Task-related stressors such as the danger associated with police work are often the focus of various surveys that ask officers to identify stressors and potential sources of burnout (Lazarus, 1981). For example, Violanti and Aron (1995) found that among a sample of full time sworn police officers in the state of New York, killing someone in the line of duty was the greatest stressor faced by the respondents. These findings are similar to those found by Spielberger et al. (1981). Violanti and Aron (1995) found that the second greatest stressor identified by officers was experiencing a fellow officer being killed.

The second theme is about organisational stressors. The examples of organisational stressors provided by participants in the present study indicate stress resulting from shift work and time pressures, role conflict and role overload. They also indicate that lack of organisational support, lack of family support, lack of voice in decision making, lack of opportunities for advancement, and lack of adequate equipment and resources can exacerbate stress. These

findings support the views of Brown and Campbell (1994) and Toch (2002) who found that the primary job demands for police officers include lack of administrative support, lack of voice in decision-making, lack of opportunities for advancement, coupled with inadequate supervision, bureaucratic nature of police departments and large amounts of paper work. However, this study did not find inadequate supervision and large amounts of paperwork to be sources of stress for police officer's in the Dog Unit.

The third theme identified personal stressors as a cause of stress. This theme included work-family conflict influencing participant's experience of stress. The results reveal that participants experience guilt feelings for not spending enough time with their families. In addition, participants experience conflict in trying to manage both work and family demands. Personal factors have long been implicated in the development of a range of undesirable, expensive and debilitating consequences, which affect both the individual and the organisation (Ross, 2005). A study conducted by Demerouti and Geurts (2003) indicated that a high portion of employed people, and particularly parents, have real difficulty in combining the work domain with domestic responsibilities.

In contrast to Maslach-Pines and Keinan's (2006) categorisation of police stressors as outlined in chapter two of this study, the participants did not identify external stressors as contributing to occupational stress.

In conclusion, task related stressors, organisational stressors, and personal stressors were highlighted as inherent causes of stress in police work, however, organisational factors such as shift work and time pressure, role conflict and role overload, inadequate resources, lack of organisational support, lack of family support, lack of voice in decision making, lack of

opportunities for advancement and lack of adequate equipment are more stressful. This may indicate that police officers are trained for police operational duties, whereas their ability to cope with organisational stressors may be less adequate. This finding is consistent with Hart et al. (1995) study which showed that organisational rather than operational experiences are more important in determining an officers' overall level of work hassles and uplifts. Another study conducted by Gershon et al. (2009) also confirms the findings in this study. Gershon et al. (2009) found that organisational factors, and not critical incidents, are most strongly associated with perceived police stress. This finding may be explained by police officer's expectations. Police officers expect and are prepared to deal with task related incidents at work. Whilst task related stress was caused by the nature of police work, organisational stress is due to the characteristics of the police organisation. Police officers do not expect to be experience lack organisational support, and they most certainly do not expect to perform their duties without proper equipment and resources. When considered together with Violanti and Aron's (1994) findings and Dabney et al's. (2011) findings that occupational stressors emanate from the inherent dangers of police work, the present results suggest that these incidents are stressful, but the greatest source of stress for police officers in the Dog Unit emanate from organisational stressors rather than task related stressors.

6.2.4 Conclusions in terms of Perceptions of Work Engagement

The present qualitative study is a first in the investigation of work engagement among dog handlers in the SAPS. Due to the lack of existing evidence to either support or disprove the results herein, any interpretation of the findings is speculative.

Analysis of the interview data indicates that participants are highly engaged in their work. The results indicate that psychological meaningfulness is strongly related to work engagement.

Meaningfulness spanned over six domains: (a) inner calling, (b) an active choice to become a police officer, (c) serve and protect, (d) sense of duty, (e) recognition, and (f) to form an identity. The findings of this study support the findings of May et al. (2004) in a study on 213 employees in an insurance firm. According to Anshel (2000), less stressed police officers view police work as a means to protect and serve the community, respecting the integrity and individuality of others. The findings of Bosman, Rothmann, and Buitendach's (2005) study show that an individual's occupation is a source of socialisation, where growth and development takes place. Furthermore, it is a place where the development of self-worth and positive experiences (self-efficacy) occurs. Individual identity is created and people are connected to each other, which leads to health and well-being in the working population (Bosman et al., 2005).

6.2.5 Conclusions in terms of Experiences of Work Engagement

The results indicate that certain resources positively influence participants work engagement, namely: (a) social support, (b) skills and abilities, (c) peer support, and (d) self-efficacy.

Positive cognitive appraisals of work situations included appraising work as significant, inspiring, and challenging. In addition, the participant's ability to immerse themselves in their work was identified as an important factor contributing to work engagement.

A study by Doyle and Hind (1998) found that despite having to work long hours, coupled with work overload and lacking support, female academics working in higher education institutions reported being satisfied and intrinsically motivated by their jobs, which they perceived as being enjoyable and potentially rewarding. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Doyle and Hind (1998), thus demonstrating that individuals can experience work engagement in situations of high demand.

Mostert et al. (2006) investigated the mediating role of positive work-home-interaction between job resources and work engagement of police officers. The findings of the study showed that job resources have a strong positive relationship with work engagement and positive work-home-interaction. The results demonstrated that the availability of job resources may help police officers cope with the demanding aspects of their job and at the same time stimulate them to learn and grow in their jobs (Mostert et al., 2006).

The personal resources influencing work engagement include self-efficacy, appraising work as significant, work is inspiring and challenging, and being able to completely immerse oneself in one's job.

6.3 Limitations of the Present Study

There are limitations involved with all investigations and potential weaknesses in the design and application (Cresswell & Clark, 2007). The limitations of this study include:

The interview schedule was created by the researcher for the purpose of this study, as a result its reliability and validity has not been tested. Therefore, the reader and the researcher cannot be certain that the questions have fully assessed the participants' perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement.

A non-probability sampling method was used. This means that the findings of the current study cannot be generalised to the population as the sample was selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher.

The timing, duration and scheduling of the interviews were compromised in relation to other demands of the members. Participant one and participant four felt rushed to complete the

interview quickly because of time pressures. Participant eight seemed preoccupied with personal issues and was therefore unable and unwilling to supply complete information.

An unforeseen occurrence during the interviews was that police officers had difficulty in describing a time when they were so engrossed in their work that they completely lost track of time. All the participants clearly indicated that they work beyond the normal call of duties all the time, but it was not easy to relate a particular incident. While this may have been prevented by providing the interview questions in advance, doing so would have limited spontaneity and natural behaviour during the interviews.

6.4 Recommendations

The findings of this study add to the growing body of literature that suggests that policing is regarded as a highly stressful occupation. The current research also adds to the knowledge about how police members experience and perceive occupational stress and work engagement. In addition, the findings of this study might be useful to understand what helps some individuals thrive and remain engaged in a highly stressful profession.

Although there is an existing body of research on police officers, the majority of presently existing research is not qualitative in design and there is no research on dog handlers. As such, the current study widens the breadth of existing research on police officers, especially in the area of dog handlers. It is also important because it made a unique effort to understand the perceptions and experiences of a population that has not previously been studied.

Although it is important to assist individual police officers whose work engagement is affected by their work stress, the researcher believes that an organisational approach rather than an

individual approach is more likely to be effective, as most stressors were found to be at an organisational level. According to Ellison and Genz (1978), “Supervisors and police administrators...need to realise the crucial nature of their role, and help to develop techniques for satisfying the needs of their subordinates in ways that enhance their abilities to perform their duties” (p. 7). Therefore, an organisational approach could include the development of techniques to improve and enhance police officers ability to perform their duties.

It may be valuable for future studies to focus on the perceived meaningfulness of police work to benefit a greater understanding of how police officers thrive in an occupation that is described as one of society’s most stressful occupations. Thus, the perceived meaningfulness of police work should be further explored.

As another suggestion, future studies can explore the underlying mechanisms of personality that produce different coping patterns and preferences. An assessment of personality traits can be useful if incorporated into personnel selection procedures for police officers choosing to join the Dog Unit.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the conclusions were made based on the objectives of the study. The limitations of the study were discussed. Finally, the chapter concluded with recommendations.

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APPENDIX A

Biographical Questionnaire

Please complete the following questionnaire by providing the required information. Thank you for answering all the questions.

1. Gender _____
2. Age _____
3. Race _____
4. Home language _____
5. Marital status _____
6. Number of dependents _____
7. Years of service _____
8. Rank _____
9. When did you start working at the Dog Unit? _____

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

I consent to participation in this research project and will provide a signature as proof that my informed consent is given. I have read and understand the following:

PROJECT BACKGROUND: This project involves gathering data through an interview to explore Dog Unit member's experiences and perceptions of occupational stress and work engagement in the South African Police Service. The data will be collected for analysis and will be published as part of my thesis.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to explore Dog Handler's experiences and perceptions of occupational stress and work engagement. By focusing on this specialist component of Dog Handlers, it might be possible to understand what helps some individuals thrive in a highly stressful position.

VOLUNTARY: Your participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from participation at any time without being discriminated against or penalised in any way.

WHAT DO YOU DO? Sign this consent form thereby acknowledging your participation to be involved in this research study.

BENEFITS: Your participation in this research project will enrich the information base. It will also provide a clearer understanding of how Dog Unit member's experience and perceive occupational stress and work engagement.

RISKS: This project does not involve any risks.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained in that a participant's name will not be asked for during the interview, nor will it be required on the biographical questionnaire or published in the study itself. A code number may be assigned so that responses may be grouped for statistical analysis of data. The research interview will be tape recorded and by signing this consent form, you will grant the researcher permission to record the interview to ensure a detailed and thorough analysis of the data.

Thank you for your assistance in providing current information regarding occupational stress and work engagement of Dog Unit Handler's in the South African Police Service. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding this study or your rights as a participant in this research, please feel free to contact me on 084 6000 407 or govenderpreadhashni@gmail.com. For reference, the research supervisor, Mrs. Shanya Reuben can be contacted at 031- 260 1249 or reached on email Reuben@ukzn.ac.za.

DECLARATION

I agree to be a participant in Preadhashni Govender's study and after understanding all the details as explained above, I hereby give the researcher:

Consent for the interview: Signature: _____ Date: _____

Consent for audio recording: Signature: _____ Date: _____

Yours sincerely

Preadhashni Govender (Student Industrial Psychologist)

APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule

I want to thank you for taking time to meet with me today. My name is Preadhashni and I would like to talk to you about your perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement within the Dog Unit. In answering these questions, relate to your perceptions and feelings and use all your knowledge and experience to provide a detailed answer to each question.

1. Facts about participants career as a police officer

- 1.1 Can you tell me about your job?
- 1.2 How long have you worked for the organisation?
- 1.3 When did you start working at the Dog Unit?
- 1.4 What are your daily tasks?
- 1.5 Do you enjoy your job?
- 1.6 What is it that you like most in your job right now?
- 1.7 What is it that you like most about your job right now?
- 1.8 What is it that you like least about your job right now?

2. Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is assessed by the perception of having little control, but lots of demands. Police work is commonly recognised as a highly stressful occupation. Despite experiencing lack of organisational support, high job demands and limited resources some members find pleasure in working hard and dealing with job demands. Having said this,

- 2.1 Do you think that your job is stressful? Tell me about it.
- 2.2 What are some of the stressors that you face in your work environment? Tell me about it.
- 2.3 Can you relate an experience of stress in this department?

Occupational stress can be caused by many organisational factors, for example, bad management, excessive workloads, staff shortages, lack of resources, lack of recognition for good work, lack of opportunity for advancement.

- 2.4 Do you agree with this?

2.5 What do you think this organisation can do to make your work life less stressful?

3. Work Engagement

Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo & Schaufeli (2000) define work engagement as an energetic state whereby an employee is dedicated to outstanding performance at work and is confident of his or her impact on the organisation. Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as being able to deal well with the demands of their job. Work engagement is characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption (*these terms will not only be defined for the participants, but examples will be provided to simplify the meaning of these constructs*)

3.1 What are your feelings about work engagement?

Vigor is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties.

3.2 Would you say that your duties are performed with high levels of energy and that you are willing to persist with your job even though you are exposed to difficulties?

3.3 Are you willing to persist with your job even though you are exposed to difficulties?

Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.

3.3 When performing your duties, do you feel a sense of significance?

3.4 When performing your duties, do you feel a sense of enthusiasm?

3.5 When performing your duties, do you feel a sense of inspiration?

3.6 When performing your duties, do you feel a sense of pride?

3.7 When performing your duties, do you feel a sense of challenge?

Absorption is characterised by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.

3.8 Can you relate an experience where you have been so engrossed and continued to complete your job, despite being aware that your shift had ended?

3.9 Can you tell me of an experience or time in the organisation when you felt engaged or disengaged.

APPENDIX D

Request for permission to conduct research in the South African Police Service

South African Police Service
Employee Health and Wellness
Psychological Services
Durban
4001

Re: Request for permission to conduct research study in the SAPS.

This letter serves as a formal application to conduct a research study in the South African Police Service. I am a registered student for a Master's Degree in Industrial Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. One of the requirements to complete my Master's Degree is to complete a research study. Having secured a place within the South African Police Service to complete my internship as an Industrial Psychologist, I have decided to use a sample within the SAPS. The research topic is: Occupational stress and work engagement of Dog Unit Member's in the South African Police Service: A qualitative study.

The research approach will be qualitative in nature as the aim of the present study is to provide an account of police officers perceptions and experiences of occupational stress and work engagement in order to understand whether work engagement is an outcome of occupational stress and mitigating the effects of occupational stress. Permission was granted to proceed with this intended topic by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The research process is currently at the stage where approval or permission is awaited from the SAPS where this study is intended to take place.

Your assistance in granting permission for this study will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Preadhashni Govender (Student Industrial Psychologist)

APPENDIX E

Letter to Participants

Dear participant

My name is Preadhashni Govender and I am a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I have currently embarked on a research study, titled: Occupational stress and work engagement of Dog Unit Handler's in the South African Police Service: A qualitative study. The purpose of this study is to understand how Dog Unit members perceive and experience occupational stress and work engagement within the Dog Unit.

It will take approximately 1 hour (60 minutes) to complete the interview. A biographical questionnaire will need to be completed by each participant who voluntarily agrees to participate in the research project. Please be assured that issues pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly considered, should you choose to participate in my research. No names have been asked for and this is also to ensure the privacy of all participants and make sure that you remain anonymous. It is important that you respond as honestly as possible. Please respond to every interview question. It is important to note, that I am interested in your experiences and perceptions.

Your co-operation through-out the interview will be highly appreciated. It is envisaged that the information provided by you will help further research and information on matters that affect you as an individual. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of this research endeavor.

Kind regards

Preadhashni Govender (Student Industrial Psychologist)