May The Force Be With You: Furthering Fresh Futures for NSW Police Psychological Strengths, Wellbeing and Retention

Pilot Study, Qualitative Research Report

For

New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF)

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PILOT QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH NSW POLICE AND UWS

The NSW Police Force (NSWPF) were concerned that record numbers of NSWPF have been on psychological medical leave and are leaving the Force due to psychological stress and trauma. Alarmingly, on any given day, an average of 12% of the NSWPF workforce is unable to be deployed (NSWPF, 2011). Over 80% of primary injuries are psychological and at least 80% of these would be partial and permanent injuries (Police Association of NSW (PANSW), 2011). In addition to this, currently, few staff (1.6%) retired; most exited via medical leave, particularly due to post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD) (NSWPF, 2011). Fresh solutions from a positive psychology perspective are urgently required to address complex issues underpinning unsustainable rates of NSWPF psychological medical leave and retirements, and to successfully cultivate police well-being (Schedule 2, UWS & NSW Police Research Agreement, 2013: 8).

This Pilot Study is part of a larger research study whose objective is to explicate psychosocial determinants of NSWPF well-being, commitment, resilience and retention, and was intended to result in innovative research-derived interventions for NSWPF. This report responds to the qualitative research portion of the Pilot Study, as undertaken by UWS.

The following research objectives were proposed and have been responded to in this report:

1. Identify critical organisational characteristics (organisational culture/climate, managerial style) of the most successful commands that can serve as a blueprint leading to a paradigm shift in NSWPF organisation/management;
   (Objective 1: Identify Critical Organisational Factors)

2. Juxtapose perceptions of new recruits and long serving officers in order to provide a basis for making NSWPF more attractive to the substantial number of new recruits who leave NSWPF within the first five years of service, and to optimise the mental health, well-being, and functioning of new recruits and longer serving officers;
   (Objective 2: Cultivate Resilience, Well-Being, Commitment);

3. Explicate novel and innovative solutions to critical limitations in existing policing research, thereby contributing significant new knowledge and a model paradigm to the international research literature. Develop research-derived recommendations for proactive strategies to compliment reactive strategies already in place in relation to injury prevention and management and the need for a paradigm shift away from a paramilitary approach, to one of supportive and collaborative leadership, which is especially relevant when dealing with psychological injuries.
   (Objective 3: Identify Collaborative Solutions).

This report has been deliberately prepared as a practical, business report, with the intention that its findings be easily understood and digested by all those who may read it.

All interpretations and discussion have been supported by an international literature review. A full Bibliography that includes all the academic references that have influenced our thinking can be found at the end of this report. In addition to this report, detailed, scholarly research papers are currently being prepared for international review and publication in the scientific community and will be made available to NSWPF as they become available.
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Between 1978 and 1996 Michael was a detective in the New South Wales Police. During his policing career Michael worked as a detective at the Bureau of Crime Intelligence, Organised Crime Squad, Major Crime Squad and the NSW State Crime Commission. Michael has also worked with the Brigade de répression du Proxénétisme and the Brigade du protection des Mineurs in Paris. As a detective, Michael worked extensively with the Arabic speaking community and, in the latter part of his Police career, he specialised in Child Protection and Sexual Assault investigations. At the time of his resignation in 1996 Michael was the Senior Investigator at the Lakemba Local Area Command.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was founded on recognition of the serious individual and organisational toll occupational stress has on the NSW Police Force. On any given workday, around 12% of the workforce is unable to be deployed, with psychological injuries being the primary reason (NSW Police Force, 2011). Moreover, the impact of stress appears to be cumulative, with few police officers actually retiring in the usual way; most exit from the organisation on medical leave due to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Despite efforts to address the issue of police stress, it remains a critical issue for the NSW Police Force (NSW Police Force, 2011).

This Report presents findings to NSWPF from the qualitative research methods component of the Pilot Research Study commissioned by NSWPF during 2013. As requested, researchers from UWS visited two Local Area Commands (LAC’s) in NSW with a view to interviewing officers at various ranks and roles within the organisation, and with varying lengths of tenure. These interviews included new recruits, as well as much longer serving officers. Interviews were conducted in a city and a regional LAC. Key findings and recommendations are included in the concluding sections.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents emergent themes from the qualitative data gathered during this pilot study. Below, these themes include explanatory notes, as well as interpretations and discussion of the evidence gathered from interviews. It is emphasised that these are initial exploratory findings, drawn from a small pilot study of interviews with officers in just two NSWPF LACs. However, much of their commentary is extremely powerful, and thought-provoking, and is suggestive of improvements that the NSWPF organisation may consider making for the future, as well as future NSWPF research.

When constructing this Pilot Study Qualitative Research Report, we were mindful of our ethical responsibilities regarding the need to maintain the confidentiality of participants who volunteered to participate in the interview process.

In response to that concern, we have (at this early stage) removed many details of location, rank and length of service for the officers interviewed, as well as carefully editing and truncating their stories if we believed that details of their location or other identifying information was present. However, we have retained this information, and are able to re-insert it, if required, at a later date. It is also available for use during future analyses.

Future reports for NSWPF will most likely include such important demographic data. Data was deliberately gathered from officers of different ranks and tenures, and LACs, to inform the analyses of their reported experiences and views about the organisation. During future research, a larger cohort of interviewees and the inclusion of data from a wider number of LACs state wide, will enable us to include more detail regarding officer rank and tenure without jeopardising the confidentiality of those participants.

Finally, we welcome feedback, ideas and responses to this early exploratory analysis, and are keen to work in close collaboration with NSWPF to refine and further develop this initial analysis as the project proceeds and as further data are gathered. Together, we are confident that UWS and NSWPF will be able to locate fresh solutions to the issues of concern for NSWPF.
## EMERGENT THEMES

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Table 1: Emergent Themes from Pilot Study Interviews
EMERGENT THEMES

OBJECTIVE 1: IDENTIFY CRITICAL ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

Police Organisation Characteristics

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Table 2: Police Organisation Characteristics

a. Perceived Ability to Provide Support

Many officers recognised and valued the hierarchical structure of the NSW Police organisation and felt supported by its presence. For those who recognised and valued it, the organisation’s hierarchical management structure provided them with a sense of security and support, which was important to them when carrying out their duties:

You know you’ve got the hierarchy. So, obviously the commander at the top, and the inspectors deal with the sergeants, and the sergeant's deal with us kind of thing. I like that. I like the idea that anybody with a higher rank than you can help you. I like that idea.

Being just this structural organisation; rank's there for a reason. If there wasn't rank, it wouldn't be much of a force.

This feeling of security, reported by some, was important because the question of stress on the job arose frequently in officer interviews. Stress was reported by many, and its sources ranged from actually doing their job (operational stress), to the more frequently reported stress that arose from dealing with the organisation itself (organisational stress or occupational stress).

Past research has suggested that operational stress is thought to have a limited impact on individuals. On the other hand, organisational stress, which tends to be brought about by poor management and organisational practices, has been found to seriously impact on organisational processes and staff morale, and has been noted by many to have serious consequences. Sources of organisational stress are commonplace and can include: gradual cultural change in the police organisation; an institutional culture that expects officers to take individual responsibility for risk; and, an increased influence of the New Public Management (NPM) ideology. The inroads of NPM, for example, have created an incentive encouraging management to attempt to reduce levels of stress leave being taken by officers, rather than address the problems that have contributed to the need for stress leave directly (a point returned to later in this report). Officers remarked that NSWPF being run like a “business” was not always a good thing:

... I sound negative, well I am but it's from past experiences. Whether you like it or not the police force is not a business and that is the way that it's now being run. It's being run like a business.
Officers frequently showed great ambivalence towards the organisation. One officer remarked that 
the organisation and its processes were good, but that it had changed a great deal over the years. 
Comments were often made about the NSWPF being a very large and impersonal organisation 
suggesting feelings of disconnection from it:

*I think it is really good. But I mean, it's nothing like it used to be. It's just so big... I'm sure 
other people feel more personal because they're younger and they're enjoying the social side 
of things as well, which is awesome. But I think for most people involved, it's a lot more 
impersonal.*

Another ambivalent officer described their job as “great”, and yet used the very evocative metaphor 
of the NSWPF being a “crooked tower”, illustrating strongly negative feelings towards the 
organisation, even though they liked their job:

*It's the cops; it's a great job, you know? It's just this crooked tower that we all work in now. 
It's disgraceful the way they treat people. It really is. It really is such a negative place now.*

Another described NSWPF as a machine, and their being part of this huge, impersonal mechanism 
that “gets things done”:

*In a lot of respects is that it's like a machine that here where it turns over and again. Like the 
organisation, it turns over. It gets things done.*

A junior officer described his experience of a very impersonal organisation when speaking of the 
lack of any personal communication with a senior colleagues (a point returned to later):

*Researcher: So you've never had a conversation with the commander here? 
Interviewee: We had a conversation when we first got allocated our positions. So, ... he came 
in. He basically told us a little spiel about himself and we told him a little spiel about 
ourselves. That was pretty much as far as it went.*

Another officer spoke of not feeling supported when they were being sued civilly as a result of their 
work for NSWPF:

*I'm currently going through two matters which I'm being sued for civilly. They're obviously not 
suing me. They're suing the Police Force for two matters which have been through the courts ... 
A colleague and myself are being sued .... They're now suing us and that's been going on, two 
matters, for three and a half years and in three and a half years, how many phone calls do you 
think I've had from the lawyers from the police or management? How many phone calls do you 
reckon I've had? None! Not a one. This is really starting to get myself and my partner at the 
time down because that's hanging over our head....

So many officers stated that they loved their job, even with its operational stressors, but 
concurrently reported feeling that the organisation that they needed to support them in doing their 
challenging work was large, impersonal, insensitive, and mechanistic, and not necessarily 
supporting them at all. Past research has confirmed that such a situation is likely to increase stress 
levels, with police reporting that the organisational aspects of their jobs were more stressful than the 
substance of the actual police work. The most frequent stressors reported in those past studies have 
included: poor management; constant reorganisations; perceptions of bureaucratic interference; 
administration challenges; shift work; high levels of bureaucracy; and unmotivated colleagues.
Similar concerns have been found in this study, and are presented in the pages ahead. Past researchers have concluded that it is these factors that are controlled by the organisation – organisational stressors – that create the most damaging effects: resource concerns (e.g. insufficient resources, unreliable equipment, lack of financial resources); activity issues (e.g. irregular meal times, shift work interfering with other activities); and workload and administrative issues (e.g. paperwork). Of note, these have been regarded by past researchers as all being elements more able to be controlled, and improved, by the organisation and yet it has been these that have presented the most significant outcomes of psychological distress.

Other, still challenging, operational factors facing police officers when doing their jobs are less likely to be such significant causes of stress. For example: the lack of public respect; a lack of resources; and public violence have all been cited in past studies as being concerns to police, and while they are acknowledged to still be so, are believed to be less likely to cause long term psychological injury.

b. Managing Officer Stress

Past research on NSW Police has confirmed that police experience significantly more frequent and severe psychological stressors than in the general population. And not only has it been found that police officers experience extreme stress, but they struggle to find effective ways to cope with it. The international literature has repeatedly found that police officers often report: failing to deal effectively with work hassles; having no confidence in their capability of dealing with work-related problems; and, of reporting that they have not successfully coped with work changes.

Officers interviewed spoke at length about how they perceived NSWPF as being able, or unable, to support them in managing their stress. We found evidence that many officers found it stigmatising to seek help, especially from within the organisation, and especially with regards to their psychological health. Some interviewees suggested their view that the stigma surrounding their seeking of help from the organisation could negatively impact a police officer’s career longevity. This view was frequently reported, offering confirmation of the potential stigma surrounding an officer’s need to access any psychological support services. Further, it was also a reported perception that “good” police officers would not need to seek such help:

_The only people I know who've done that [gone off sick with stress] ... are people – [pause]. The only cases I know here in uniform are people who should never have joined this job to begin with. And it's really sad and they're really nice people ... There are a couple of cases here at the moment and I understand why they want to stay in this job, because of the pay, but they should not be here. They should never have joined this job. If you worry about minor things, don't join this job. It's just not conducive, and there's nothing the organisation could do and there's nothing that anyone could do for those people that I know that have gone off sick with stress here. I've never seen a good worker go off on stress._

Concern was expressed directly about accessing the organisational procedures and processes that had been designed to support them, even when they believed their need was genuine and the stress they were experiencing was work-related. One officer spoke of needing to take sick leave and stress leave that was work-related, but of denying that the stress-leave was work-related when asked by a senior officer. This was reportedly done because of all of the administrational, political and organisational challenges that this would have presented for that officer in need:
Ultimately, I went off in the first week with this gastro and I took an extra week on stress leave. [Name of colleague] had to ring me and ask me if it was work related and I said, “No, not work related”. Had I have said it was work related, which it was, I then had to go through the reporting processes where I've then got to justify why it's work related. And it becomes a worker’s comp issue where the workers, the liability; they'll come and investigate whether it is work related or not, whether worker’s comp insurance should pay. Which means I've then got to document it there for the Police Force to see how fucked the Police Force is. I thought, “No, I’m not going through it.”

It was also acknowledged that rumour and gossip surrounding the taking of stress leave could damage an officer’s reputation, especially if it related to their mental health challenges. However, more harmful and damaging still was the humiliation and shaming that reportedly could take place within the organisation, especially with regard to some of the formal processes around stress leave and the rehabilitation of those who needed to take it. Sometimes, events and processes that existed surrounding the return of an officer to work, after they had been on stress leave, were reported to be not only unhelpful, but were seen to be providing further shameful and traumatising experiences for the individual who was trying to return to work:

I still remember one of the things that caused me the most angst was that when I finally came back to work. And I was cleared for full duties. I couldn't find my gun or handcuffs. No one knew where they were. It turns out, three months earlier, because of the risks, they'd said, “Just put them in an envelope and hide them.” Which is what they did. But they never turned around and thought about, “Well, what's going to happen when he comes back?” So, it shouldn't have worried me, but it did at the time.

Officers also reported feeling that they would be “marked” if they accessed the support program that was in place. This weighed heavily on one officer’s decision to return to duties, and prompted him to return to work perhaps earlier than would have been otherwise recommended:

There is still that culture of not being seen as weak and not being able to cope. That probably impacted on me not wanting to go off either. I was only off for three weeks. Some people saw it as a dummy spit or just dropping the ball.

The impact of stress on individuals has also been noted in the literature as being cumulative. The impact of stress leave at high levels on NSWPF as an organisation has also been cumulative, with very few police officers actually retiring; most having exited from the NSWPF while on medical leave due to PTSD. NSWPF’s own research has confirmed that more than 70% of such PTSD cases have been claimed to be related to internal issues within the Force including events of interpersonal conflict, bullying and poor human resource management.

c. Perceptions of Management

Perceptions of the NSWPF as an organisation, was frequently reported by interviewees as being what attracted people to join. However, this same organisation was also reported to frustrate or confuse staff, thus providing a further source of organisational stress. Participants were asked what they thought was effective about their organisation, including management structures, support offered and, in the case of management and how they were performing, what officers thought could be improved from within the organisation, as well as what they believed was being done well.
There was a significant and disturbing ambivalence in the responses received. One officer reported the desire of management to perform well, but spoke of staff feeling patronised and devalued by management, especially since there had been changes in shift arrangements:

*I think most of them [management] have got good hearts and they want the best for everyone. But I think when we got 12 hour shifts the whole service changed .... They talk to some of the constables like they're kids .... That's why half the people leave the police. I think it is because they're sick of being treated like a kid, because it's just embarrassing.*

A loss of faith and trust in management, and their ability to perform well, was also reported:

*I've lost all faith in the management of the New South Wales Police Force and it seems to be – [pause]. Actually I'll take that back because, like I said, it goes from supervisors to management to senior management .... Most of the junior staff within the police force have absolutely no faith in management within the police force anymore because of what they do and the decisions they make.*

The negative remarks about management continued, and again mention was made of the changes in shift arrangements:

*There are some supervisors here who, honestly, I don't know if they're on a power trip? These are normally the ones who are hopeless, who haven't ever really done much, who have always come from some type of hidey-hole, managerial position and, to get promoted, they've got to accept a Sergeant's job. So they come here .... And then, out of maybe frustration and their own issues, they treat people like they're children. But no one can make a decision. I think the police do a good job at jobs. But just the way they treat each other is just childish at times.*

*We've just got so many different layers of management and I think that that has just -. They're just managers. They're not our friends at all. At all.*

*Management. Without a doubt management in the New South Wales Police. It's atrocious, absolutely atrocious management. So, having to deal with their decisions they make.*

*The issue is what management is doing here at the moment and just destroying us with the shifts that they expect us to work .... Where are you getting the staff to do this? What's your rationale behind it? “Because I can.” That's the answer we get. Don't be a fucking child about it and come up with an answer like that. You're supposed to be fucking management. You're supposed to be a grown man. What is your rationale behind it? No, don't just say, “Because I can,” you know? That's just fucking childish.*

*Most of these people in the New South Wales Police wouldn't survive in the private sector. They really wouldn't with the way they treat people and the way they act and the way they manage.*

**Researcher:** So support from managers and above?

**Interviewee:** Zero.

**Researcher:** Zero?

**Interviewee:** Absolutely none. None whatsoever.
I think ... they’ve gotten fed up of having to look after people. So, I’ve kind of just been left in the dark with figuring my own stuff out.

Some reported, not just negative perceptions of management, but what they regarded as incompetence, unprofessional behaviours, including activities that undermined others:

The commander we had here was not strategic at all. He liked to think he was but he wasn't. I'd be working towards a particular goal with my staff linked in. Then, out of left field, he'd go around me, go straight to my staff and say, “You are doing this by this date and I want a report on this.” I'd just blow up at him.

The commander would openly call me and F-ing C, not to my face. But it would all come back to me. There are a lot of people here who support me so it made that working relationship with the commander very tenuous, difficult. In the end I just treated him like a leper

And, yet, on the other hand, some very specific positive remarks that the organisation should value:

I never feel that I'm left to my own. If I need help, I've got help.

A fantastic sergeant. He, like when they were putting the body in, the contractors, to remove the body from the scene, he turned to me and said, “Look you don't need to watch this if you don't want to.” Like it wasn't that kind of sense of, “This is your job. You have to do this.” It was, “If you don't feel right, if you don't feel well --”. Like really supportive in that kind of sense. Yeah, like I can name half a dozen situations like that.

A lot of people aren’t willing to let you help. But when they do, it’s fantastic.

I've worked for some great commanders. Great for a whole host of reasons. Great operationally or in their leadership, or great in their support.

Finally, there was a clear distinction in the minds of many interviewed between officers and management. It was perceived that there was a clear separation, even segregation, according to rank. As mentioned earlier, for some, this structural divergence was highlighted as a positive, offering security and support; however, for others it was regarded as a schism that existed that created a situation that could not be relied upon to be predictable, protective, supportive or trustworthy. For example, some of those injured during their work noted the absence of support from management over that time. When this was noted, it was considered to be very poor form:

In one of those matters I ended up in hospital after copping a flogging in the street... My welfare whilst I was in the hospital? Phone calls I got from work? Zero. Not a one, from management., from senior management. The only calls I got were from my immediate colleagues and mates in the office, coming up to the hospital. “How are you mate?” You know? “What can we do for you?” That's that tight-knit camaraderie which we have. Management, not a one.

These sub-themes reveal that there are aspects of the NSWPF that may contribute to, or at least fail to ameliorate, the stress and strain that officers face. Many of the issues raised also appeared to be problems that were internal to the organisation and that could potentially be remedied, and needed to be examined, given that organisational stressors have been noted as significant detractors from police officer well-being, sometimes more than the stressors and strains of operational duties.
Officer Stress Responses

Table 3: Officer Stress Responses

- **Officer Stress Responses**
  - a. Surface Acting and Playing the Game
  - b. Stress Experienced
  - c. Coping Responses

**a. Surface Acting and Playing the Game**

Some officers claimed to be unaffected by the traumatic events they faced on a regular basis during their operational police work. This could be the case, but another possible explanation is that, given the stigma surrounding perceptions of weakness, especially having any form of mental illness, in the NSWPF, officers were pretending to be fine, acting out a part for others, to convince their colleagues that they were fine, when really they were not. While it is noted earlier in this report that organisational issues can be more stressful for officers than the sources of stress faced in the operational police work they do, it is still recognised that police face a great deal of very traumatic situations when doing their work, and on a regular basis. We suggest that officers may, for a variety of reasons, prefer not to acknowledge this with their colleagues in the NSWPF and so act as if they are fine when they may not be:

*I just don't get affected by it really. Someone could jump off a building and I'll just – [pause]. Unfortunately, I'll just do the job and that's fine.*

Surface acting is one way workers can regulate their emotions at work. It involves presenting emotional displays that conform to what they think other people believe are the norms and expectations of their workplace. Surface acting requires a supressing of emotion, and a faking of what is perceived to be the more appropriate emotion called for by the situation by using particular facial expressions, tone of voice, and other behavioural responses. Unfortunately, the emotional dissonance created by surface acting has been suggested by past researchers to be connected to numerous social stressors and negative work outcomes such as job dissatisfaction, depression, burnout, and staff turnover intentions. Such an inauthentic work existence would also negatively impact on officer wellbeing.

One officer spoke at some length about his need to pretend to a community member from how he was really feeling; this officer felt he needed to deceive them, and it made him uncomfortable:

*We went there, and couldn't find him. He didn't answer his phone and then he went to a police station and the police. He wasn't happy with how they spoke to him. Because obviously they said, “Mate, well we don't know who this person is. Nothing's ever going to happen with this.” Then he came down here and he wanted to complain about police response so the sergeant spoke to me and I just agreed with the sergeant. This is how sad this is. And he just said it would be easier ... for me to actually pretend to him something is going to happen... So, I sat there and just listened to his story and wrote a statement. If it was in the old days, I would have said, “Listen. I've got to tell you the truth ... We'll never know who that guy is. This is a waste of your time. I'm sorry that happened. I made a*
mistake.” But you can’t do that now. Things like that just are stupid. It’s pretty sad really. I guess heaps of people do that though.

Surface acting, because it is a performance, a way of behaving that is not believed by the person doing it, requires that person to still also go about their work day in a sometimes constantly inauthentic state, pretending to feel positive about things they are not, or covering sometimes very strong negative emotional responses. Such behaviours add to the stress and strain already being encountered during their work day, potentially compounding it and exacerbating it.

b. Stress Experienced

Many officers spoke of very challenging and stressful events during their working day that they had difficulty dealing with, and that they chose not to talk to anyone else about. Despite the NSWPF offering counselling and other support services, if the culture of the organisation is such that officers perceive that it is stigmatising for them to access the support services on offer, they won’t reach out for help that might be critical for their long term mental health and wellbeing. One officer spoke of one such occasion where he had to deal with a very challenging, grief-related work episode, and had spoken to no-one about it:

... It took three days to be able to tell the police and by that time the baby was dead. We got there and baby was deceased. We did all the crime scene examination, stripped the baby off, all the rest of it. The body snatchers came to take the baby away. They had a little bassinet, all the rest of it. But the mother wouldn’t let the baby go. For whatever the reason, the mother said, “Well, you can take the baby and make sure it's kept warm.” The baby's name was ****** I think. It had to be kept warm and all the rest of it. “Yeah. No, it'll be alright. I'll look after it for you. No worries.” So, out the door of this unit I go, down the street. I'm sitting there holding this dead baby for about 15 minutes, thinking to myself, “This ain't right. This isn't how it's meant to be.” But those things stay with you because you can relate to it. You relate to having children and that type of thing.

Researcher: Do colleagues talk about those sorts of things amongst themselves? No?
Interviewee: No.
Researcher: Do you talk about it with anyone?
Interviewee: No, not really.

Officers spoke frequently of deaths they had witnessed, and how this had affected them. But few of them had spoken of their feelings, or the experiences, with others, at home or at work:

It's the worst thing that you can do, go and see a little kid. I've done a murder where the father killed a kid and that was probably the worst thing I've seen in the police. That one took the wind out of me.

And there was recognition among the officers themselves that there was a need to do something to mitigate the sometimes vast amounts of trauma being faced by them; that no-one could endure such things without harm over the long term if they weren’t doing something positive to respond:

If police aren't doing those positive things like exercising, debriefing, there'll be no cop over a standard period of time that doesn't cave in.
NSWPF have recognised the amount of trauma, stress and strain that police officers have to engage with when doing police work and, to that end, the organisation has clearly made significant efforts to put in place counselling and other support mechanisms to assist officers in dealing with their trauma. However, the evidence here suggests that what hasn’t changed is the culture of the organisation to being one that enables, accepts and supports officers when dealing with their trauma in a way that helps them heal, especially over the longer term. Currently, officers believe they will be stigmatised heavily by accessing such services, and indicated also believing that their colleagues would no longer find them trustworthy to carry out their duties in the field if they did. So, NSW police are coping with all the stress and strain they face the best way they can. However, as can be seen in the next section, some coping responses by police officers were positive and effective, but others were not.

c. Coping Responses

Officers interviewed reported a number of mechanisms they used to cope with stress. Some of these were positive, and some were clearly quite negative and likely to be unhelpful. Given the number and voracity of stressful events they were likely to encounter, both operationally and organisationally, confirmed by the amount of stress leave currently taken within NSWPF ranks, the responses in this area, combined with already noted phenomena of surface acting, feeling stigmatised about seeking help, and not talking to anyone when they needed to, should be of considerable concern. Alcohol use and misuse was still reported as being a quite routine (and unhelpful) reported antidote, for some:

*It's a standard joke with, “How do you deal with stress? Go and see Dr Reschs!” We had a psychologist come in and ask us the same thing. How do you deal with stress? “I go and see Dr Reschs or Dr Claude.”*

*Every time I've ever got into a dark spot in my life, I fall back into that habit. There's nothing wrong with having a couple of drinks but its knowing when to stop. And yeah, that's caused a lot of, a lot of angst.*

*There's too many cops out there who are broken now who should still be in this job ...*

On the other hand, there were reports from officers who were taking more positive and proactive steps to deal with the stressors they were regularly faced with:

*There's sport. Pretty much, whatever takes your fancy; whatever your hobbies are. Some guys downstairs box. Some downstairs do martial arts. Some guys run and some girls play netball or just go home and be with your family. So, you all have your own coping mechanisms.*

*I know going to the gym is sensational. I joined up one of the local gyms and got my little routine you know, 35- 40 minutes on either the bike, the cross trainer or the treadmill. And I can walk out of there feeling absolutely a million dollars. When I was younger I always played football which was great ... As I've got older and retired from footy, I just play golf all year round. Well, now as my kids get older I've got their sport to go and watch them play ... I look after my diet a bit better.*

These positive responses are noted, but were not universal. They also may not be sufficient, for some, to mitigate the high levels of traumatic episodes officers may face.
OBJECTIVE 2: CULTIVATE RESILIENCE, WELLBEING, COMMITMENT

Policing and Trust

- Policing and Trust
  - a. Needing to Trust
  - b. Unmatched Expectations
  - c. Role Conflict
  - d. Role Engagement – “Flow”
  - e. Staff Turnover

Table 4: Policing and Trust

Trust is not only desired by members of the NSWPF, it would seem to also be an occupational requirement. And trust was reportedly required in many domains and roles of police work: trust between officers doing operational aspects of their job; trust between operational officers and management; officers trusting that the organisation would support officers when they needed it; and, trust that the organisation’s structures, polices and processes were appropriate and adequate to provide the support that officers felt they needed. The interview data revealed that if trust was absent, or doubted, problems would arise. Past researchers have noted that in all organizations, trust and mutual trust, are integral elements of high performance teams and require close attention by management to maintain. Trust has also been identified as being notable in that it is fragile and reciprocal in nature: building trust among team members can take a long time but, if betrayed, can take even longer to repair.

a. Needing to Trust

Officers spoke frequently and frankly about the need for trust:

*But it's just a matter of knowing who you can trust. As I said, trust is a massive thing.*

Officers spoke often of the need for trust but that sometimes it was not present, and needed to be:

*When you feel as though you haven't got the support of those, that you can't trust them, to be quite honest, they stab you in the back. The cops talk; we're terrible gossipers. I hate gossip. Rumour, gossip and innuendo just doesn't wash with me. If someone hasn't got the balls to say it to your face, my honest opinion is they should just shut their mouth and move on. I've got no time for it, I don't like it. It's negative.*

Trust between officers and between operational officers and management has been noted by past researchers as a strong constituent element in what is termed “the psychological contract”. The psychological contract is a term used to describe what management expect from its employees, and vice versa. While the contract itself can be dynamic and organic in nature, and is usually formed without a specific formula or model, it frequently has a very strong influence on determining behaviour within organizations by individuals. Researchers confirm that staff perceptions that the psychological contract had been breached would also be seen as a significant breach of trust.

Trust was a binding factor within many of the workplace relationships for those interviewed for this research. The reading of situations, scenarios and relationships (with other police, and with the
community) were reported to be constituent elements that informed the psychological contract that officers believed they had entered into with each other, and with management, on a day to day basis. Officers spoke about their colleagues not just needing to be trustworthy individuals, but of being able to be trusted to do their job competently:

*I think people have to earn your trust just as I have to earn other people's trust. I probably, especially at the upper levels of the police, I understand why some bosses used certain staff, because you trust them ... I'm not talking about, the inherent trust is the ethical one and all that sort of stuff. But the trust about, ideally, about whether they can get the job done needs to be built up with me. They have to show that they can actually do it and that sort of thing. I get disappointed if people let you down, especially if you communicated on X, Y, Z being done and it doesn't get done at once.*

There was strong recognition during interviews that officers relied strongly on one another, and needed to be a strong team:

*We're not individuals. We don't work as an individual. So, working together in a good, hard core, knit team is so important.*

The data also revealed a need for trust that can manifest either consciously or unconsciously, and in numerous areas. This need for trust was in several areas: between police officers working together; between police officers and the senior hierarchy of the organisation; and, with the broader community. Given the inherent risk of police work, trust was seen to be essential to the role and process of police work so that officers might execute their professional responsibilities adequately, but also with a sense of security and confidence; feeling that the organisation and its management will be behind them if they faltered, or struck trouble:

*Being able to trust the people you work with, having confidence in the people you work with. At the end of the day, if I'm working with you, my life is in your hands and my partner. So, I've got to be able to trust you knowing full well that I've got the utmost confidence in my work colleagues; that they've got my back, I've got their back.*

Researchers have confirmed that when trust is precarious, or absent, the entire psychological contract, whatever it might comprise, can be called into question. This, in turn, can be very detrimental to working individuals, especially their ability to function effectively and remained motivated. If officers felt their psychological contract with management had been breached or not fulfilled by the other party, the sense of betrayal accompanying this could undermine existing trust even further. This has been confirmed in the literature and can potentially harm the organisation in a number of ways, through: lowered morale; reduced motivation; and, increased leave-taking, absenteeism, and resignations.

There was evidence of this in our data. For example, one officer reported that they had been bullied at work, but that they did not trust the organisation or senior colleagues enough to share the difficulties this offices was experiencing on the job. This officer’s reported view was that if they had reported the bullying to a senior colleague, that this would have made matters worse for them. At the time of interview, the bullying had, fortunately, ceased and this officer confirmed that they were very relieved they had told no-one:

*Upon reflection, I'm glad I didn't go to a sergeant. I'm glad I didn't go to anybody in the police force and tell them what I was going through. Because of course, you've got that kind*
of trust or whatever. But ultimately, he's going to have to go to that [other officer] and say, "What's going on?" And they're going to talk and everything else comes from that and it happens again.

The importance of trust in a positive workplace culture, and in supporting officer resilience and wellbeing cannot be overstated. While requiring further evidence to confirm the substance of possible difficulties around trust between officers and within the organisation, it is the case that if officers could not trust the organisation, its processes, and its management to support them, this would be highly likely to have a negative impact on their wellbeing, performance, motivation, desire to return to work after stressful events, and their intention to remain with the organisation.

b. Unmatched Expectations

Expectations of both new and longer serving police officers were often reported to be very different from the reality of how their work as a police officer really was. Many officers spoke of their expectation, when either joining the police or earlier in their career with NSWPF, of being part of a police “family”. Such a metaphor was frequently used, very evocative, and strongly suggested an expectation of support, and protection, and being part of a collective that cared about their welfare:

> When I first started or before I joined, you know, I always thought the police force would be like an extended family. You know, you'd have that kind of sense of togetherness. You know and the idea of the community, or the bad guys as them, and then us. You know, like team work...

Some also spoke of being part of NSWPF as being a “lifestyle”, not just a job. Many of those interviewed enjoyed being together with other officers out of hours:

> I remember when you’d first join the police, it'd become a lifestyle. It was all your shifts, then team drinks, playing golf with the boys, and all that type of thing.

The data also revealed officers’ clear expectations (that were not always being met) around what being a member of the police force would bring to them, both personally and professionally. The need to belong to the collective, and not just any collective, but one that they perceived to be dedicated to a “greater good” was very prevalent in responses, as was the associated need to feel a sense of unity and connection with other people in the organisation who they believed would be doing the same good work:

> When I was 16, I made a conscious decision to join the police force ... Because you know, I wanted to help people, always have. I wanted this kind of a job where you're always out there which is good.

> I wanted to do law but I didn't want to be a defence solicitor because, I don't know, I guess I grew up with “bad guys are bad guys”. If you represent bad guys, you're a bad guy.

For some, though, there was disappointment expressed when the reality of their working day as a police officer did not always match their clear expectations. Being part of the collective, as they had envisaged it, was also not always as they had anticipated. While being part of the collective was well regarded, as discussed above, and was often likened to being part of a family, on the downside, some saw that within the larger police organisation collective, were smaller groups that were variously described as a camps, groups or cliques by interviewees. These smaller groups, and how
they sometimes worked in negative ways within the organisation, were frequently noted with
disappointment, frustration and confusion, especially their role in undermining the binding or
cohesive elements that officers claimed needed to be present:

*Once you've made your bed, that's your camp and people don't forget that. And I'm talking
about management. They don't forget it and they're very, very vindictive. Very vindictive and
that's not just from me. You'll hear that from a lot of people. Management within the police is
very vindictive if you're in the wrong camp.*

*But since getting into the police force, and even in the police academy, I found that it's not
like that [a family] at all. It's a lot more like, you know, you've got your cliques and you've got
your groups of friends and stuff like that; people you speak to and people you don't. Like it's
not that kind of sense of togetherness that I had hoped for and that I thought it would be.*

*When I first joined you had a small station and knew everyone and you were there all the time
on eight hour shifts so you knew everyone. Now, I don't know half the people. Maybe not half,
but I wouldn't know, well, at the moment because we're joined up [with another station], I
wouldn't know half the people. I wouldn't know their name.*

Other areas of what the job entailed were also found to be disappointing by some. They had come in
with clear expectations of what they thought the job would be, but what had transpired for them was
not aligned with their expectations:

*Like, I thought it would be a lot more community based as well. Like, I thought there would
be a lot more community based policing.*

*I feel like I gave up everything to come out here and do my job. When nothing happens, I get
a little bit down about, “What have I given up, and for what?”*

There was also evidence to confirm what has been reported in the literature previously; that when
there was a significant mismatch in expectations about the job, and what it would be, that this could
be linked to staff turnover. One officer confirmed that the lack of match between what people
thought policing would be, and what it actually involved, resulted in lots of staff choosing to leave
the organisation:

*There is less and less people that stay on this job very long any more, just because it's just a
job. It's not what people make out.*

When talking about organisational issues that could arise, such as conflict, there was also evidence
that some had high expectations around what the organisation might be doing to resolve such issues.
Sometimes, these expectations were also not being met. This reported unresolved conflict was
perceived as being very harmful to the morale of an area, and to the organisation as a whole:

*[Regarding unresolved conflict] It just chews away at the place. It has a massive impact on
moral. It can impact on work performance ... It can just chew away at a place. And it can be
like a cancer.*

There was also a gulf, for some, in terms of the specifics of doing their job. Some reported feeling
insufficiently prepared to do the work they were required to do; others felt conflicted by different
expectations placed on them in their work. Past research describes role conflict as internal conflict
that occurs when an employee or an individual is faced with divergent expectations and requirements in their job role, which makes it either difficult or impossible for them to comply with one set of expectations over another, and so to fulfil their duties. When this happens, the individual affected can find themselves faced with a choice as to which expectations to fulfil, which creates internal self-conflict, ambivalence and other outcomes of psychological discomfort. In some instances, they may choose avoidance of the conflicting job roles, and choose to do nothing at all. Officers discussed the ambiguity and lack of clarity that could arise around their job roles and how they responded:

Well if you don't know how to do something, you just avoid it.

Role conflict can be stressful for the individual concerned, and would also be likely to create stress in other officers who find that they have been let down by the officer experiencing role conflict avoiding work that they feel unprepared to cope with, or conflicted in performing. Such outcomes would further impact issues of trust and be deleterious for organisational performance over the long and short term.

c. Role Engagement – “Flow”

Recent research in positive psychology has identified a state for people who are working well called “Flow”. In this state, the person is completely focused, and motivated, and immersed in the task at hand. With the state of “flow” comes and experience of timelessness, occasional spontaneous joy, and a sense of satisfaction with the work that is completed. However, the state of “flow” can only occur when that person is working with a task or challenge that is aligned with their abilities and skills. Challenge can certainly be present, but the skills and abilities to do what is required must also be available. Officers reported, on many occasions, that they seemed to be experiencing “flow”, which is a very good thing for them, and a very productive outcome for the NSWPF organisation. One officer spoke of enjoying having big jobs to do at work that he could get very involved with, especially when that involved working in a positive team environment:

Sometimes people say, “Oh, you've got a big job on. You've had a terrible day?” and I say, “No, it's actually quite good.” Because you concentrate on that job and you go from the start to the finish of that job. Your staff, basically, are carrying out that job. So it's a good team environment.

Knowing that I've made a difference in at least something I've done and that focused on something. I like finding something that I care about to move forward with. I like being busy, very busy and productive.

Certainly, to achieve more, having officers working in the “flow” state would be a positive objective for NSWPF. Achieving that objective would be assisted, according to the evidence that emerged in this research theme, if officers were able to trust themselves, each other, and the organisation, and for their NSWPF workplace expectations to be matched closely to their everyday experiences at work. On the other hand, if “flow” is not present, especially if other negative workplace factors also exist, staff may choose to leave that workplace.

d. Staff Turnover

Staff turnover was also recognised as a clear problem by NSWPF management, but also by police officers interviewed. Evidence of their concern and some of the possible reasons for it emerged in
some of the respondent stories. We note that NSWPF research has already confirmed that many officers are still leaving the organisation as a stress-based medical discharge. NSWPF research has confirmed that between 1 Jan 2009, and 18 May 2011, that 66% of officers leaving the organisation had received a medical discharge. The peak age of discharge (post 1988, with claims) was 36-40 years (44%). The majority (82%) of medical discharges were between the ages of 31-45 years. The length of service (post 1988 discharge, with claims) was mostly around 16-20 years. However, 26% of medical discharges were in service for between 11-15 years. 24% were between 6-10 years. Of the post 1988 discharges, with claims, group, 79% were discharged with only psychological injuries. 14% had both physical and psychological injuries. Very disturbing is that 93% of all medical discharges from NSWPF had a psychological component (NSW Police Force, 2013). So, and very understandably, NSWPF is concerned about the problem of staff turnover. We explored this during the pilot study. Mention has already been made above as to why officers might leave the organisation prematurely.

Participants also spoke about there being a certain ‘type’ of person who can succeed in policing. This so-called “ideal officer” varied between participants’ reports, but included commonalities in relation to attitude, ability to deal with pressure and, importantly, what the ideal officer’s beliefs might be about the job and it what it should entail:

You've got to love cops and robbers. You've got to love chasing criminals ... There seem to be people who join this job and it's almost for a social life or something, some of the younger people. I don't begrudge them that but it'd be nice if they also had a passion for actually arresting people, the right people, that is.

There are a couple of cases here at the moment and I understand why they want to stay in this job: because of the pay. But they should not be here; they should never have joined this job. They're stressful people. They worry about everything and this isn't the job where you can worry about things. If you worry about minor things, don't join this job.

You've just got to be hard working. I mean 90 per cent of all jobs are just the same. You've just got to have a go really. You've just got to be a hard worker. If you get out there and have a go, you're going to build up your skills. The icing on the cake would be if they love to arrest criminals and if they treat people well on top of that. I mean I don't know what else you've got to do.

Only a certain type of person, I think, could do it... It just makes me want to prove that I'm strong enough. If you don't want to be here, this can be hell on earth. I think some people who don't want to be here, and possibly never wanted to be here, but struggled to get out, would be very unhappy in their job.

High staff turnover has been noted as being very harmful to many organisations, but also in police organisations. One study compared the impact of voluntary and involuntary turnover on organisational performance among police departments, and found that voluntary turnover had a more negative impact. It was also suggested in that study that managers needed to address the concerns of strong performers in police organisations in order to reduce their dissatisfaction and reduced their incentive to leave. In addition to this, while it would normally be expected that the turnover of poor police performers might be beneficial to the organisation, this same study claimed that the departure of poor performers could also become detrimental to organisational performance if their vacancies were not filled quickly.
Officers interviewed in this pilot study were also reportedly concerned about how the high levels of staff turnover and how this might have been negatively impacting the NSWPF organisation, and their ability to do their jobs:

*We do a very bad job of replacing staff after they've transferred out ... Because someone will transfer out, and we don't advertise their position until after they've transferred out. Which means that there has been no real induction or handover from the person going out, to the person coming in.... Regardless of whether the person on their way out is a great operator or a raving lunatic, regardless of that, they've still got all that local knowledge and history that they've built up over two, three, four or five years, whatever it might be. And that just disappears overnight. It's gone on the back of a removals truck. Then you get someone else who comes in and will be keen, and then they've got to start all over again.*

If management were believed to have not offered support to staff who needed it, or were seen to have deliberately undermined staff, this was considered by interviewees to be a likely cause of turnover and absenteeism. The outcome for remaining officers was also reported: that they then needed to be reliant on less experienced, less effective, less knowledgeable replacements when compared to those who had left the organisation:

*[on the previous Commander] Dysfunctional. He didn't have balls. He made it so much worse, giving into all the underlings and no senior management support whatsoever. It was piss-poor management, it really was. Well, we had inspectors going off on stress leave and refusing to work with him and it was not good. Then I'd lose them and I'd have no support because the ones that replaced them, like the sergeants that acted up, were piss-poor.*

Respondents in this research believed that way officers were managed could have been responsible, at least in part, for the high staff turnover. This would be something the NSWPF could look towards improving in the future, especially if such a concern is confirmed during later research:

*They talk to some of the constables like they're kids .... That's why half the people leave the police I think. It's because they're sick of being treated like a kid, because it's just embarrassing.*

This research also exposed participant perceptions that it was very difficult to advance within the NSWPF. There was a perception that getting promoted was very onerous and, worse, that it was perceived to be unpredictable and exclusive. If it is widely reported during interviews that internal promotions were very difficult – next to impossible even – to achieve. Such beliefs, whether true or not, can also negatively impact staff motivation, and intention to remain with the organisation:

*When I was going through the promotions process, that was probably the biggest anxiety that I had.*

*The promotion system, instead of police, this is way out there. Police should be paid on seniority and not on what rank they obtain. Because now we just have people who, all they want to do is sit around and study for the next exam or boost their CV or make connections on how to get promoted... That all changed when they brought in merit-based promotion. I used to just see guys just sitting around studying. While I was doing police work, I'd just watch guys sit around and study so they could pass the test so they can get promoted. I don't see how that's of benefit.*
It's not as bad anymore but there's still that degree that people are more interested in getting promoted more than helping the public. That's organisation-wide. I'm sure every station's exactly the same. Their concerns are to get promoted and it's got nothing to do with helping someone on the street.

Police officers at all levels of NSWPF showed evidence of concern with the problem of staff turnover from the organisation. Some of the early messages presented here suggest that attention to some management practices may offer one means to address the problem of staff leaving the organisation prematurely.
Surveillance of Police Officers

| Surveillance of Police Officers | a. Other Police Officers  
b. Ombudsman  
c. General Public  
d. Media |

Table 5: Surveillance of Police Officers

Police officers reported that they were routinely observed, even scrutinised and judged, as part of their daily routine when doing their job. This was perceived by them to be a particular challenge; police officers interviewed frequently spoke of how they were challenged both personally and professionally by surveillance processes and individuals, from numerous quarters, pervaded their lives and the conduct of their job. The sources of surveillance they spoke of were also expanding and changing, and existed simultaneously with ongoing changes taking place within NSWPF as an organisation. The sources of surveillance specifically commented on by officers during this pilot study included: other police officers; the Ombudsman; the community and general public the police were working to protect; and, the media or what are known as the ‘Fourth Estate’.

One of the main issues that was reported in this study was how the surveillance takes place, was constructed, and what its impact is on police officers as individuals, and as a collective, might be.

a. Other Police Officers

While surveillance of police officers has been shown to inhibit their discretionary behaviour (such as inviting leniency when dealing with offenders), the increased potential for litigation facing police was also reported to have risen dramatically over the last three decades. From this increasingly litigious context has grown a term called ‘litigaphobia’, which describes a deep seated anxiety around the legal action that threatens a person who is executing their role.

As police officers are able to make complaints through the same legislation as the public, one aspect of concern raised during interviews was the potential conflict that could arise for an officer, especially with regard to their role in complaints that have been made. They could either be involved as a complainant, or as an officer defending a claim.

Officers involved in this research consistently reported the pressure and effects of the ‘complaint system’ that surrounded this police legislation, suggesting that this could impact on them daily. Research suggests that almost 30% of complaint reports made against police officers are made by fellow officers, with the remainder of complaints being made by the public. The impact of this system is not only enforced by statute in law, but by other factors discussed by interviewees.

For example, the question of integrity of the process and the officers making complaints about other officers arose. Interviewees shared their perceptions of the complaint system and spoke about their experiences with it. While agreeing that individual officers should have the right to complain about other officers if the genuine need arose, officers interviewed also felt that the evidence used to support such complaints needed to be verified in some way to ensure its validity at the outset, to ensure the avoidance of purely vexatious complaints going forward that could potentially damage the reputation of an officer, and yet still be without reasonable cause:
Now I've had numerous made against me over the years, which I know were done for no other reason than to try and affect the way that I was doing business against those people …. I was taking on one particular person who was breaching his conditions all the time. He started making allegations against me, you know, taking bribes and stuff like that, which is just totally untrue. But the police department, wanting to be open and honest and transparent, did an investigation, one to showed him that, “No, this hadn't occurred.” … Because unless they offer some actual evidence and something reasonable and decent about the complainant, we shouldn't even have to touch it.

When speaking of having the right to complain via the Police Service Act, officers also spoke of the fact that, once a complaint had been made, those handling the complaints (also from within the police) needed to follow protocols to ensure the protection of the NSWPF as an organisation. The stated concern by interviewees lay, not with the need to protect NSWPF, but that in doing so, there could arise a conflict of interest where the interests of the officers, either as complainants, or those being complained about, were not necessarily remaining highlighted against the backdrop of NSWPF needing to protect itself. Here, again, the question of officers needing to trust in the organisation to support police officers doing their work arose through discussion of the administrative processes used to respond to this constant community and police scrutiny:

*The person who's doing the investigation has no rights; he can't say anything at all. He can't talk to anyone about it, he can't defend himself and he can't defend anyone else. I've been caught in this situation many a time, where you know what's being said about you is bullshit. But because you're being investigated, you're tied by the Police Service Act, the bloody complaints management system, that you can't disclose anything. You can't defend yourself. That's really bad. That is really damaging for the police because all they're hearing is gossip, rumour and innuendo that's being spread in the meal room and they're not hearing the full side of it.*

Such problems were recognised to effect operational police right up to senior management:

*That's unfair on senior management, the boss. It's unfair on the duty officers who can't, or shouldn't (I'd love to say they don't) but shouldn't, be talking about that sort of stuff out of school, as such. That's not just here, that's obviously service wide.*

b. Ombudsman

Our evidence suggested that the Ombudsman is a further set of eyes gazing on police along with other police, the general public, and the media. While the Ombudsman may not have powers to prosecute and may exercise discretion in regards to what is recommended for further review or enquiry, the Ombudsman is still considered an ‘external agency’ by police officers and one that represents the community, rather than only serving as an investigating, independent body.

*I've had to do quite a few recently where it's just, unfortunately, these ones were encouraged by the Ombudsman. To put it bluntly, they were crap, absolute crap. There were police officers doing their job and it was legitimate and they were doing it. But they were just listening to the community who were having a whinge.*

The Ombudsman, again rather than being an independent investigator and having a legal representative force of its own, was viewed as another ‘organisation’ with extraneous powers to directly determine or direct police activity, rather than investigate and recommend actions to
remediate. While the Ombudsman’s function in reality may be to handle complaints, it was the process of investigation that was the cause of much disruption to the lives of officers interviewed:

*I'd love to change the complaint management system in the cops. I'd love to be able to just get rid of all the bullshit that we're faced with and, honestly, the encouragement of complaints from other organisations outside the cops, such as the Ombudsman. If we could get that so they can really feel the confidence, that they can go out and do it and not be scrutinised for everything they do. That would help them a lot ... All you hear them say is, “It's fucked. It's absolute bullshit. And why are we having to answer these questions? Especially when we're dealing with complaints where there's no substance behind it.” There's no quality behind it but somebody's decided to make a complaint, so we've got to go through the process.*

The Ombudsman investigations could be framed as an additional external organisational stressor for police officers, one that may be necessary, but that was perceived as being potentially adversarial and prosecutory in its purpose. The Ombudsman’s Office was considered by some in the interviews to be open to potential exploitation by those in the general public (or within the service) who’s claim could be vexatious and without basis.

*Probably one of our biggest frustrations is external agencies, especially government-orientated.*

*I know we can triage complaints, we can get rid of them. But even the triage process still takes a bit of effort. For me to triage a complaint and get rid of it, it could take me two hours. That's two hours of my time that could much be better spent, rather than sitting there dealing with someone's need to be, or have a whinge or a gripe at the police force. People are going to be unhappy when we deal with them because we deal with people that are at their lowest of their lives...*

The potential fall-out from public complaints and the perceptions of an unbridled process raised the question of whether the NSWPF was also at the mercy of other external agencies such as insurance companies during such processes. This served to compound a sense of police feeling like machines, that were sometimes “damaged”, but could be fixed up easily, and cheaply:

*I really don't want to see us go down the path of having our organisation when it comes to staff who are suffering or who are off duty, on return to work plans or whatever, I don't want to see it get to the point where the decisions are being made and reigns are being pulled by insurance companies. Because we're not motorcars. We're not trying to get out of fixing up something that's been damaged in a motor vehicle accident for the cheapest quote.*

c. General Public

Further concerns with surveillance and complaints were also discussed, especially about the NSWPF‘s handling of both internal and externally initiated complaints concurrently. One officer spoke at length about the 'Police Services Act' (2003), a legislative imperative that places responsibility for processing and resolving complaints, both internal and external, with NSWPF itself – a situation some would describe as ‘police policing the police’. As noted above, internal complaints are certainly an issue of concern for many officers in NSWPF but so are complaints from the public. Both were reported to take a lot of resources to respond to. The NSWPF’s response, and how it was handled, was also seen to be a potential area for undermining trust in the organisation:
We probably get one out of every 20 or 30 complaints gets substantiated, and the other 29 are crap. There's no value in it and there's nothing there to justify why it was made in the first place.

The general public, as an external stakeholder to the NSWPF, was also described as another source of surveillance by several officers interviewed. Public perceptions of police officers, and how they conducted themselves as individuals and as an organization, were part of the reported experience of “feeling watched”. There was also a strong perception by interviewees that police officers, how that person conducts themselves, and the job they are required to do, were always in the public eye:

It's hard not to switch off, especially when you sign up for a job where you're never not a police officer. On a day off you're still expected to step in sometimes .... So you can't really turn off. The pressure's through judicial system and public expectations.

But even with this scrutiny, there remained a strong sense from those interviewed that police as individuals, and as an organisation, worked for the community. It was believed to be important that the community felt confidence in the police:

I think to a degree .... people pretty much think of you as their own personal resource. They want to be able to know that they can stop you in the street. They want to be able to talk to you while you're standing at the bar having a beer on a Friday night at the meat raffles or wherever it is. They want to know that you won't bullshit to them; because they can just see through that. So having a complete, both feet, jump straight in, is what they want.

The constant visibility of officers doing their jobs was raised in a dichotomous way: on the one hand, they felt that the constant public visibility was exhausting and extremely difficult to regulate or even filter. On the other hand, the fact that they what they did was so public, on show even, was something that officers reported experienced with great pride, and as something that they reported helped define them personally.

It's amazing the number of people who meet me for the first time and straightway they go, “Oh, you're a cop aren't you?” Because obviously that's the way I carry myself and I do believe it's a big resemblance on my character.

While the constant scrutiny and surveillance from the general public was viewed with concern, police officers interviewed also suggested that frequently they enjoyed, and were proud of, being noticed by members of the public. Certainly, though, the constant scrutiny, if not well managed, could also become a source of significant stress for officers, especially in regional areas where they were “closer” and better known personally to the members of the communities they served.

d. Media

The media was also reported to play a pivotal role in police work, often by communicating information to the broader community about the police and their activities. Police officers, when off duty, reportedly confirmed them also being members of the broader community and, as such, also accessed this media information about police, the police organisation, and policing activities. However, they felt that media representations of the organization and its members could also impact directly, and negatively, on how officers identified with the NSWPF, and their role within it. This, in turn, shaped how officers perceived NSWPF as an organization and how it was supporting them.
The media was also seen by many respondents as a surveillance group that represented the public, not the police, and that the media could, and did, inform the public of their rights. Again, while acknowledged as perhaps being necessary, when there were inaccuracies or inconsistencies in the media messages conveyed to the public, these caused considerable frustration and were seen to further undermine police standing, especially when police officers felt unable to share their perspective on events of concern. Interviewees gave examples of what international scholars have identified as “moral panic”, a phenomenon resulting from emotive and one-sided media attention, combined with political system attention, that police have to work within:

*Probably my frustration - again, something that I can't change - is the perspective in the media. That we can't tell sometimes, the general public, exactly what is going on because of privacy and all that sort of thing.*

Moral panics require the prior existence of a public disquiet or concern (even if not coherent) that is capable of causing social tension. Then, an event or series of events arises that may involve police and portray them negatively. This triggers significant media attention (including emotive language, and lurid details) and the previously latent public disquiet becomes crystallised. A group, or individuals, are then demonised, stereotyped and held responsible (often, police). Various experts and “moral entrepreneurs” are then called in to discuss the issue and the events that have transpired. The state may then institute measures of response, often needing to be enacted by police, such as new regimes of law and order to address the heightened public concern. Then, as quickly as it has emerged, the problem evaporates. Such negative media coverage can leave police officers feeling disliked and disrespected by the public they are endeavouring to serve.

In some instances, the media was also regarded by officers as a mechanism responsible for de-mystifying and disempowering the organization, which then served to provide further challenges for officers in their daily role. Officers spoke, for example, about how constant media exposure had decreased the sense of importance of the NSWPF and had potentially undermined the organisation’s standing within the community, sometimes leaving officers feeling exposed and potentially more vulnerable when carrying out their duties:

*The police put themselves on TV and all these types of things. There's no mystery for the police anymore. Coming to the police station for some people is like going to McDonald's. So there's no defence for us.*

Officers also believed that media representations regarding their public role could influence an officer’s decision to either strive to advance within the organisation, or to depart from it altogether. Senior posts were increasingly viewed as political roles, not policing roles, with increasing seniority within NSWPF being believed to lead to a role of PR advocate for the organisation, rather than supporting police work:

*Particularly at superintendent rank, you're basically a political appointee when you become superintendent.*

The impact of constant surveillance cannot be underestimated; police reported feeling “watched”, and losing confidence, knowing they were constantly on show. They were afraid a mistake would be harshly judged by the general public. They also feared that such mistakes could have negative consequences for them, as individuals, and for the organisation. Officers need to believe NSWPF will support them, even when making mistakes that might reflect badly on NSWPF for a short period, so they can trust the organisation, and themselves to carry out their duties with confidence.
Workplace Support Dualities


Table 6: Workplace Support Dualities

Dualisms and dualities in the workplace happen where there is a coexistence of two opposing states or parts, which may be physical and organizational (e.g. NSWPF offering psychological support for officers to support their wellbeing, but processes within that same organisation leaving officers feeling vulnerable, traumatised or humiliated), or personal and individual. Several such organisational dualities were exposed during interviews, especially around police officers experienced anxiety and confusion when doing their jobs. Such confusion, tension, and anxiety often resulted, as noted above, from the wide array of both operational and organisational stressors, as well as dichotomies that were believed to exist between job expectations and realities. These also combined with perceptions of ongoing scrutiny and surveillance from so many sources, internal and external, to the organisation. Officers spoke, possibly as a result of all this, about their constant comparisons between what ‘is’ and what ‘ought to be’ when doing their work.

a. Accessing and Perceptions of Support

First, it was apparent that NSWPF is concerned with offering support to officers at all levels in the organisation who are undertaking police work. There was little argument against notions that police needed support: physically, psychologically, emotionally, managerially, and structurally from the NSWPF organisation. Evidence of needing and wanting this has been reconfirmed in the stories above. NSWPF have also done considerable work in reviewing the status of these support needs within the organisation and it is noted that many initiatives have been undertaken, and remain in place that have been intended to remedy this critical officer and organisational concern. The NSWPF Review of Injury Management Practices (2011), for instance, emphasises the need of the organisation to focus on the abilities and strengths of returning officers to work, as well as underscoring the need to step away from a previously adversarial system which has served to undermine trust and open communication in the workplace. It would appear that most of those interviewed for this report would agree with this desired objective.

Officers interviewed all had a general sense of the systems in place within the organisation to support their well-being. Depending on the issue for the individual officer, they spoke of being aware of various options being available to support their physical, mental and emotional well-being. However, it did not appear that there was always a full and thorough understanding of what was available, nor was it clear that officers believed that such support procedures and policies were fully supported by management. Support that was reportedly used was often considered by officers to be something much broader, and less formal, than the many of the current formal programs and services that were to be found within the organization. Support was regarded as something that ideally should be given, offered or shared between people, and in a myriad of situations in the workplace.

Officers were reportedly grateful that NSWPF had recognised the need for such support and developed a strong recognition of mental health injury. However, they believed a gap still remained
in terms of the ability of officers to access the formal support programs that had been made available by the organisation to assist. Interviews revealed that, while officers still often preferred to talk to peers or mentors informally, they also recognised that there was a strong need for a personal and professional rapport and trust to exist, in order for such informal processes to be workable. There was also recognition that there needed to be more than just the informal sharing mechanisms, because suicides still happened, now and in the past. One officer spoke of how well the informal processes could work, but noted their inadequacy, nevertheless:

The only support was the old, ‘sit around on a Thursday night cut-out’ .... Back then, we're talking a long time ago, pre-Royal Commission, you'd have a couple of beers at work on the Thursday night in the meal room and have a chin-wag. That, still to this day, I still believe is one of the best support mechanisms you have, because although we didn't have the [EAP] and all that sort of stuff, we had each other. People would talk to each other. But on the same token, we also had a lot of police back then commit suicide. Because they didn't feel that they could talk openly and honestly.

We've become a lot better now in identifying that people need to have support for these things. Everyone's different too. Like some people enjoy the EAP; enjoy counsellors. I never have. I've enjoyed talking to people that I trust and dealing with it that way.

We also found little distinction between sworn and unsworn staff responses in not only sometimes feeling extreme dissatisfaction and stress in various aspects of their police roles, but in deploying the organisational systems that were currently in place to help them manage it. One individual was emphatic about their difficulty in talking to anyone about their stress. Ironically, this same person reported feeling bad when they didn’t support the NSWPF’s attempts to find out more about what was going on around stress and coping responses, and the usefulness of the support systems in place within the organisation:

I just suck it up and go to work, and try to sleep. I could quite easily just go off on stress but I won't. I can't go to a doctor and say I'm stressed, and I will never go on medication ... I don't think I could sit in a doctor's office and admit how bad it is. I don't know how to say it without saying-, without feeling like he'd think I was faking it, type thing. I probably know I'm stressed, I probably know that I'm a little depressed sometimes but I just – [pause] I don't know. I just can’t say it to a doctor. I could probably talk to counsellors ... I used EAP once, because the roster officer before me put in a stress work thingy and I got interviewed about it. When I read back my interview, it didn't seem like I was helping her at all and ... because I know how stressful it is. So I declined helping her and that really upset me. So I spoke to EAP then. That's pretty much it. [unsworn staff member]

It would appear that the felt stigma around acknowledging stress remains strong in NSWPF and is working against the organisation’s best efforts to provide emotional, physical and psychological support to officers. And while stress triggers might be different for sworn officers, reported responses to stress by sworn and unsworn interviewees was fairly consistent, and included an acknowledgement that organisational support was required for stress and strain:

I suppose doing child protection was the trigger. It was the thing that finally wore me down and had the breaking point. There I was working long hours doing plenty of miles, pretty much working on my own without support and carrying a lot, everyone else's emotional baggage. Which meant that I was full ...when you're stuck in it, in that dark place, yeah it's difficult.
Unfortunately, and despite a clear need, it became clear that EAP and other NSWPFF support services were still rarely accessed as a result of the perceived stigma surrounding doing that.

I was diagnosed with the dreaded PTSD back in 2003. So, that's a roller coaster ride where you not only ride it on your own but the collateral damage of your family that ride along with you ... I was offered an opportunity to come back when I came back to work, in my return to work plan, after three months, transferring into the command ... Which was a positive for me, because as far as I was concerned, I was adamant that my time was done. I thought I was pretty well unemployable and this is back in 2003. So, we're 10 years down the track now. That was a stepping stone to get back into the workplace.

Return to work after injury and organisational support for this was greatly valued by this officer. It was felt that there was additional pressure of having a PTSD diagnosis. While expressing extreme gratitude for a safe return to work, which enabled officers to continue their work and career into the future, extreme anxiety was reported around the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD, presenting a two-pronged choice for those who suffered this particular mental health injury. First, they reported needing to decide if they should risk reporting it to the organisation, and taking the risk (that they perceived to be the high) that a corollary of shame would follow. Second, officers also spoke about what they perceived as danger for them in returning to a place of work that they felt would not necessarily support them adequately, and preserve their dignity, upon their return.

Support was also discussed in relation to informal mentoring and support programs needing to directly include involvement from management. Respondents felt that support in the job of policing did not necessarily need to come from formalized programs, or extensive training, but rather from senior staff and peers sharing real life experiences that may mirror those currently experienced by injured officers. This would serve to assist injured officers in feeling that they were not alone in their experiences, and trauma, and not feel that they were “less of a police officer” because of having experienced and acknowledged some very traumatic events, and their responses to it.

Experienced officers who had shared their traumatic experiences were seen as very helpful to those less experienced, and enabled a less stigmatising avenue of support for those in need. Many officers recognised that they had difficulty discussing their emotional pain, or accessing formal support services to do so. They also reported not knowing how to openly express their inner turmoil and seek help, and of not wanting to because it might impact their work life negatively in the future. Those discussing the value of such informal support, perceived comradeship and open dialogue within the workplace felt that this was an ideal platform to enable them to seek the support that they recognised was needed to cope.

So, I know early on when I was probably 20, I saw an incident ... where basically this guy had run from an RBT site. He'd rolled the car on [a main] Road. I turned up and he was still hanging in the car upside down. I went, “No worries.” Next thing I looked down and his brain was right beside my foot. I went, “Oh, that's a bit ordinary.” But what was more gross, was across on the arm-guard railing on the other side, his face had actually been cut off. Peeled off like a mask, sitting on the ground. It was looking up at you.

The description from the officer above is a vivid recollection of what was, clearly, a very traumatic experience. But also evident in his description were euphemisms used to describe appalling events, possibly used to cover, or at least Understate, how he was really feeling. Finding a person’s brain next to his foot was described as “ordinary”; that same person’s face peeled off like a mask on the ground was described merely as “gross”. Here was an example of a traumatic episode being shared,
and remembered in excruciating detail, from years earlier. And no help had been sought by this officer at all to deal with any of it. He had spoken of his ordeal with no one; just carried it around in his head, until a senior colleague shared a similar experience and the officer finally felt able to share his trauma, without feeling stigmatised by the sharing of it:

_That took me, I reckon, six months to deal with because I couldn't, being young and inexperienced, I couldn't talk about it. I couldn't explain it and I was having numerous sleepless nights. It wasn't until we were actually sitting around the meal room one night at work .... We were having a chin-wag and one of the senior constables was just talking about different things. He talked about something he saw and how it affected him and gave him sleepless nights. I went, “That's affected you?” He went “Yeah, yeah.” I went, “Oh.” Then I told my story and once I realised that it was normal for us to experience that, it really helped me. I wasn't different to anyone else._

This kind of support from senior officers was considered paramount to successfully managing stress in policing. It was believed that, regardless of an individual’s levels of resilience, without this kind of support from senior officers, and colleagues, it would be very challenging, even impossible, for any of them to cope:

_To do this job for a lengthy period of time you need to have resilience. You've got to have resilience... I am pretty resilient too, whatever. But what I did learn is I cannot do my job and operate at this level without the supporting commander._

This officer, below, indicated that it was “obvious” that he couldn’t talk to anyone at his work place about how he was feeling because of possible gossip and associated stigma:

_Yeah, just having somebody there to like support me through it was really good. Because obviously I didn't feel like I could really rely on anyone here. You know, everyone talks. So I didn't even want to go to my sergeants and say, “Look, this is the issue I'm having.” Even my parents were really, really supportive of the whole issue as well._

If there was a perception of an absence of what officers thought was accessible support within the NSWPF, some officers (mostly) new recruits indicated that they would seek support outside the organisation. But not all said they would do they would do this. It is recognised that if there was a supportive network for them to access, such as family and friends, that could be invaluable. However, efficacious external support networks cannot be relied upon to always be available for new recruits (or more experienced officers) to access, and if they aren’t, the well-being and potential longevity of those officers could be jeopardised. And it remains the case that some officers choose not to speak to anyone about the events in their working day.

More experienced officers discussed the informal support processes that had existed within the workplace and how, over time this had changed because of the introduction of more formal support policies and processes. It was felt that, while more formal systems should remain in place, that they may not be accessible to all equally because of personal or situational circumstances that may have prevented access. Evidence presented above confirmed that access of such formal services was perceived as stigmatising by many, deterring their access to them. Officers sometimes made it clear that, in this more contemporary setting, that the opportunity or likelihood for a dialogue to exist to offer peer support that they would have enjoyed was not present.
One officer spoke of having been moved away from support networks having been transferred to a different location; this is a factor that might need to be carefully considered in future when transferring officers to different LACs:

To begin with, you try to stay in contact. But then it gets a bit hard because you're hearing about people's lives …. Because I'm the only one in my class that got [to a different location] and a lot of my friends were stationed, it not together, within a 20 k radius. So you kind of feel like everyone's getting on with their life and you're kind of stuck, to an extent.

Regarding use of formal return-to-work support mechanisms and their ability to support returning officers, some espoused the multiple benefits of positive involvement from management in offering support to their colleagues. This, from a senior officer who felt they had contributed to the well-being of a junior officer in need of support:

I went and spoke to this young officer. She's a good kid but I could see that she was jaded. She just was virtually dragging her feet into the door. I asked her if she was interested. The six week rotations turned into almost three months. She finishes up later on this month. She's taken on board two high risk juvenile offenders to intensely case manage them. In the time that she's been doing that, so probably for the last six to eight weeks, neither of these kids have been locked up. Neither of them has been identified for committing a crime. I'm, just thinking, “You know, how easy is it?” She's loving it. Talking to her only this morning on the phone, she's totally reinvigorated. She's coming back to work, back to her substantive role in uniform which she's part of a proactive team which concentrates on addressing crime and locking up crooks. You can just; you can see the change in her face and hear the change in her voice.

Support that was visibly offered and received, by and between all ranks for the NSWPF was thought to be very valuable. Support was also felt to be valuable just by the presence of very senior officers; it was considered valuable that very senior staff would make the time and effort to be among staff at all levels, and in all locations, in the NSWPF:

I do like our leadership at the top at the moment. I think Mr Scippione to me is showing really strong character as a Commissioner for Police for Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong, North Coast and South Coast. But he needs to spread his view and needs to encompass the fact that he is the Commissioner for the whole state. I haven't seen the man, in five years, come out to the Western Region.

b. Communication in Distress

Officers discussed their perceptions of support and levels of communication within the organisation, specifically as these were perceived under stressful circumstances. Most officers understood, acknowledged and respected the need for the chain of command and rank. However, there were also reported frustrations with the operation of some lines of communication, particularly if there had been an expectation of support from management around a traumatic event, and it had not been received. Indeed, some officers described a lack of support when they had expected support to be forthcoming; many went further, describing their experience of being criticised and attacked, rather than receiving collegial or managerial support when they needed it:

I know this has been dragging on. In actual fact, we'd got emails recently from management at this facility here telling us that this matter's been dragging on and on and on, for way too
Some respondents indicated they wanted to do what the NSWPF Review of Injury and Management Practices (2011) report recommended, but felt they had not been furnished with sufficient information to do what was expected of them as managers and, that when information regarding mental health support initiatives came to them from NSWPF, it had been passed to them through unexpected channels. It was suggested that when this happened, their positions were undermined, as was the organisation’s, and confusion emerged regarding lines of authority:

I would question why we were doing this. And, “Where does this tie in to what we were already doing?” He didn’t directly reply … “Can you consult with me so we can -- ?” You know, “We’ll drive this but, like, how about a bit of consultation?” I didn’t get a reply. No reply. There was another example of a similar thing where they … questioned but in courteous way. It was never, no. They just got no reply …. We have a chain of command in the police force, of course. And he could email and/or talk to anyone he wants to. He’s a Commander. But at the moment he goes around his Inspectors and his senior management team straight to the sergeants for something that should be done in consultation with the Inspectors, and the management team to then drive. You then get the, “Well, who’s running the show?” Or, “Who do I report to?” Or, “What's going on here?” from your subordinates.

You’ve got my subordinates going, “What the hell’s going on? Why are we doing this?” Or, “Did you know about this?” And I'll say, “I don't know. I've got no idea. I'm going to work it out.”

Other managers have reported having to withhold information from others and have done so deliberately to try and get their staff to focus on what can be done, rather than what cannot. Some officers reported their belief that they were under no obligation to explain further to those reporting to them what was going on. However, the response from staff reporting to them who were left with insufficient information (in their view), was to become disengaged, demotivated, and feel belittled:

I think a lot of people get upset and disgruntled or that sort of thing with management if you don't communicate things. Because you're not telling them; you don't have to tell them what you're doing. You just [tell somebody] when you can do something.

The other side of the story is that, those believing they were not receiving sufficient information felt ill-prepared to do their jobs. Some officers expressed confusion when they didn’t understand the lack of information they were receiving, feeling that they had been left to read situations themselves to try and understand them, rather than having a person they could defer to for support, and that they could seek reassurance from, and possibly, with guidance, initiate a resolution if need be.

Longer serving officers in particular, spoke at length about inter-personal conflict being an issue. For some, their response was simply to stop communicating about something, or to that person, altogether – not really an ideal outcome from the organisation’s point of view:
But as I said to him at the end, “Regardless of what happens, at the end of this conversation, when I get up and open that door we will never ever fucking discuss this again. Because I'm over it. You think you're over it? I'm over it.” .... I'm a bit of a venter, I admit to that. But I like to vent and when I do, then I'll move on.

Other managers spoke of their intolerance of workplace gossip and rumour, suggesting that not only did they not encourage it, but they were fearful of its effects on staff. However, they remained concerned with the ongoing need for transparency in communication.

*Chinese whispers won't come into play, variances won't come into play. It's just got to be very clear and very transparent.*

An alternate view by some officers suggested a distrust of the NSWPF’s deliberate emphasis on transparency during complaints procedures. They felt that the complaints system, as it currently worked, sometimes worked to damage police officers rather than protect them. The so-called transparency that they spoke of, and believed management sought, was viewed with cynicism, and trepidation. They felt that the organisation’s best interests were being put ahead of individual officers caught up in the process:

*The organisation would override anything to become “transparent.” You know what that issue is. You know, things happen and the main concern for this organisation is to remain transparent. And that everyone can see they haven't done the wrong thing or treated someone unfairly.*

In the face of this mistrust, officers spoke of their increasing reliance on alternative, informal modes of communication that ensured they knew something of what was happening around them. However, they also recognised and shared their perceptions that these cloaked conversations could also be as damaging, and their negative role was not underestimated:

*Quite often the rumour mill takes over and people seem to make up their own minds ... Like I said in terms of rumour mills and that sort of thing I'm usually one of the last to find out so I don't hear about it .... And even then, well if somebody thinks that of me, well they can think it of me .... I'm doing it the way I see is the right way to do it.*

Unfortunately, for officers who were the subject of rumours, their reported response was often to withdraw from the organisation, as a mode of self-protection. However, the unfortunate and serendipitous consequence of this was that they were then without the support of colleagues, formally or informally, at a time when they needed it most:

*I've had rumours spread about me recently but at the end of the day ... they're rumours. I really don't care. But apart from that I don't really socialise with police officers outside of work therefore I wouldn't say that I know everything that goes on.*

Some managers were more pragmatic about organisational communication, seeing it as a skill that could be taught and developed either formally, via education, or informally perhaps through mentoring within the NSWPF workplace. There was recognition by managers that all staff needed to learn effective communication skills as a matter of course much like any other skills that were necessary to do their jobs. Some spoke of learning communication skills, and how they did that:
There are some people who are really not that good at correspondence. I've learned how to do it properly as well. Everyone at Uni had to learn how to write properly and that sort of thing.

Others spoke of developing communication, and other skills, through informal mentoring of others, or through general managerial competence:

Depending on the nature and the volume of it [the issue], I'd sit down with a constable and work through it because, again, it's showing them how to do it.

c. An Inclusive Environment?

Belonging and being part of a group or ‘family’ in the NSWPF work environment was cited by many interviewees as their reason to join. Being able to belong has been considered by past researchers as a skill in self-regulating behaviour in the workplace. An individual’s feeling that they belong, or not, is considered by many organisational researchers as something that can be communicated by management, peers, and individuals. Ostracism, on the other hand, involves the communication of a message to workers that confirms not only rejection, but a state of not belonging. Officers interviewed spoke frequently about the possibilities for them of being rejected, and ostracised, when working for NSWPF. They mentioned various metaphors to describe whether they, or other officers, were being included, or not; “camps” was one such metaphor:

The police force is very camp orientated. You're either in this camp, this camp or this camp and if you're in this camp, you're not in my camp. That's it. It's all over and there's nothing you can do to change from going to this camp to this camp. Once you've made your bed, that's your camp and people don't forget that and I'm talking about management. They don't forget it and they're very, very vindictive. Very vindictive and that's not just from me. You'll hear that from a lot of people. Management within the police is very vindictive if you're in the wrong camp

One new recruit described their difficulty of not knowing where they belonged and the repercussions of being placed with the “wrong” person in their workplace when they joined. This officer used the metaphor of “cliques” and spoke of how challenging they could be, especially to one who was new to the organisation:

People you kind of feel ostracised being around as well... People have their cliques and they protect their cliques. Whether that means actually resolving a conflict or wearing something. Because I don't know who's who yet and I don't know what's what yet. It's really difficult to tell.

Knowing where to fit in was considered particularly challenging by new officers in that they believed that if they made the wrong choice early in their careers, it might affect their career over the much longer term. This officer also spoke of the need for an officer to be the “right fit”:

Everyone has been kind of friendly but, at the same time, I think I've come in at a really bad time for this station because morale is pretty low and they're dealing with their own issues. So, it's the double edged sword of, you want to go out and make friends and be social, but doing that can also get you in trouble .... It's pretty gossipy. Your life isn't your own ... which I'm not used to. .... It's a bit more difficult than I thought it would be ... Because I am still fairly young, and at the same time, trying to
figure out where I fit into situations and what my role is, in life in general but also with the police.

I found that, maybe not respect but like, yeah ... you've got a long battle with certain people and stuff like that... I think, looking back now, I think it was like a similar case of ostracising.

It was important, for many, to find ways to fit in. Participating in things was seen as one way to do this:

I think the station is split up into two categories; the people who are staying and the people who aren't staying. The people who are staying, generally get involved in sport and get interactive and get involved. The people who aren't staying try to do as little as possible.

Part of the sense of inclusion also came from a shared feeling of being part of a bigger cause. As discussed earlier, for many, doing good work for their communities was frequently cited as a reason for joining NSWPF. This was described by both new recruits and longer serving officers alike. However, both groups also noted that ideas of belonging to a police “family”, and the reality of this, were not always aligned:

Before I started I always thought it would be very much like a team comradeship. Upon joining I've realised that it's different. [new recruit]

The police force of the olden days, whether it be good or bad is gone. The camaraderie and the mateship: a lot of people feel it doesn't exist anymore.[senior officer]

Longer serving officers claimed that the sought-after sense of camaraderie did exist in the past and was effective. They also discussed their view that they felt there had been a shift away from that camaraderie over time. The sense of belonging, they felt, had also been an important component of the vocation of policing:

When I first joined this job it was, I don't know if vocation would be the right word, but it was something where you were a part of; a family.

Most believed that the incentive to remain in NSWPF was not a financial one:

So you have people who are here just for a wage, ....who were quite low paid before we got all these massive pay raises after the Royal Commission and things.... If you stayed in the job, you stayed in for a reason. You didn't stay in because it was great pay.

What was again confirmed in this theme was the ambivalence many of the officers felt about the organisation, the role of being a police officer, and the support they actually received from the organisation. Fortunately, many of the issues raised here are things that the organisation has the power to address and respond proactively too.
Officer Ambiguities and Challenges

| Officer Ambiguities and Challenges | a. Powers of Discretion versus Fear of Judgement  
b. Good Cop, Bad Cop  
c. Cultural Negotiations  
d. Good Days, Bad Days |

Table 7: Officer Ambiguities and Challenges

a. Powers of Discretion versus Fear of Judgement

Police are expected to exercise discretionary powers when it comes to law enforcement in many professional situations such as public order offences. However, in contrast with wide ranging powers and responsibilities with the public, police interviewees reported being either reluctant or feeling unable to necessarily, or comfortably, exercise those same discretionary powers and responsibilities when it came to their own ‘self-care’. There was a fear of judgement apparent in some of the comments received. It may be that this same fear of judgement from others could negatively influence an officer’s decision as to whether to seek support from within the organisation, or not.

There is still that culture of not being seen as weak and not being able to cope. That probably impacted on me not wanting to go off either. I was only off for three weeks. Some people saw it as a dummy spit or just dropping the ball.

Officers also discussed the fact that they felt as though there were more palatable alternatives for them that might solve their need to take leave to recuperate. There was a reported belief that taking sick leave (as opposed to stress leave) was less stressful for officers, and more socially acceptable within the workplace. However, from the organisation’s point of view, having a person on the “right” kind of leave would ideally require those with a psychological injury to take the kind of leave they needed to ensure they got the help they needed to resolve their mental health injuries, and better protect their wellbeing. Unfortunately, there were several reports of officers preferring to take sick leave to avoid the stigmatising processes surrounding stress leave:

It's all because that insurance company's got to decide whether they've got to pay or not, the workers' comp premium. I've got plenty of sick work issues now, which isn't the right way to do it.

I reported it to region so it didn't come through here, because the problem was here. So there's mechanisms to do that. But really, when I weighed it up, to what benefit? I've got sick leave, so I'll use it.

And not only was it a hassle to go on stress leave administratively, officers signalled their belief that they could be harmed further if they followed that route. Interviewees intimated that to go on stress leave and to admit they were not coping, would be humiliating. They also spoke of fear for their future careers if they accessed such services. The comments in interviews suggested that the culture of NSWPF was one where negative judgements would accompany officers who sought medical or
stress leave due to psychological injury. The culture was also one that promulgated the view that an officer who “needed” such leave would not be able to do the job of policing, was not a “good cop”, was not coping, or was otherwise unable to be trusted by other officers to do their job effectively:

I’m just going off rumour, that there have been a couple of stress leaves and a couple of injury leaves, and a couple of, I don’t know what kind of leaves. But at the same time, I think it’s got to do with digging their own grave, rather than having to deal with stuff.

The reference to “I don’t know what kind of leaves” suggests a negative judgement about the taking of leave on the part of others by the officer speaking here, and that the some kinds of leave may be believed to be specious and unnecessary by those requesting it. Those interviewed who believed they had been recipients of harsh judgements from colleagues discussed how such judgements were a re-traumatising experience for them, compounding the effects of the stress that had already created problems for their psychological and emotional health and, for some, could have resulted in a hastening of their departure from the organisation:

Rumour, gossip and innuendo kills us and it’s childish. It’s terrible stuff. To the point where because I’m so anti-, having witnessed it, how it’s burnt people; having witnessed how it's almost destroyed people and sent them to the wall; how I’ve been a victim of it myself.

b. Good Cop, Bad Cop

Throughout the interviews, issues of trust continually arose and were coupled with references to officers’ personal ethics and that individual’s idea of what ‘good cop’ might be. References to what made a ‘good cop’ arose around questions of fairness and integrity, including when dealing with minority groups. It was perceived that a balanced perspective to such concerns was not only essential to being a ‘good cop’ but also to do ‘good policing’ and maintaining a realistic view of who is being dealt with, and why:

Depending on where you work, it really does affect your belief in different racial groups and different ethnic groups. But again, I think a good police officer can identify that we have to deal with 10 per cent of any population, and we shouldn't judge that 100 per cent, or the remaining 90, by that 10 per cent that we deal with. .... The rest of this community are working hard and being great people, we don't deal. But we do have obviously a negative view that is formed by that 10 per cent. I think that's a bad thing, being very cynical and judgemental.

This same officer also understood that;

People are going to be unhappy when we deal with them because we deal with people that are at their lowest of their lives.

Senior police also spoke of what it meant to them to have “good” cops working with them. Police management discussed their need for a “good cop” who was a manager to be able to: trust subordinate staff to perform in their role effectively; complete tasks competently and safely; avoid disputes and potential complaints; and, to ensure the smooth running of the station. Interestingly, some officers shared an ambivalence, and inner conflict, on questions around being “good” or “bad” cops. Some criteria for what makes a “good cop” began to emerge and warranted further investigation:
[a bad cop is] just not a lot of things: not personable; not friendly; just slags you off to the management; telling you you've done the wrong thing. Just things like that. Just things that are bad traits in any person, not trustworthy, things like that.

Some reported their belief that, sometimes, the “good cops” were the ones that performed their role well but found themselves denied promotion because these were the people more likely to speak up over issues of integrity within the organisation, and to adhere to their personal codes of ethics while doing their job. Paradoxically, it was reported by some, that these same “good” officers were being overlooked for promotion or advancement within the organisation because of their determination to maintain ethical and high standards, and their preparedness to speak up if things needed to be said:

Sometimes you just see people who are really good cops just getting harassed because they've got a bit of attitude. They've got a bit of -, I was going to say a really old word: They've got a bit of spunk ... They're held in uniform. I know a few people who are held in uniform, basically as punishment. They're not allowed to go anywhere.

The “good cop” was also described as someone who led with confidence and assured others as they went about their daily routine:

Someone who's got experience, got all those qualities of just a “good cop”. And someone who's confident to back themselves and to stand up to people. As soon as you're on a shift where you've got a weak sergeant you're just, “Oh my God.” It just takes the wind out of everyone's sails really.

The pressure for performance on the “good cop” was described as coming from a myriad of sources -- personal, organisational and public -- and usually was informed by an individual’s internal dialogue. Integrity in that individual was reported to be essential in the “good cop” as was the idea of fairness and appropriate treatment of others. Officers who were interviewed reported having a strong sense of justice that also included their personal conduct when dealing with colleagues and offenders alike:

I still remember my father saying to me, you know, ... he said, “You've got two choices. You can either be a cop who's known as a good bloke or a cop who's known as an arsehole. I think I'd rather you be known as a good bloke.”

I'll say, “Look, I'm sorry. I don't work that way.” .... I enjoy locking up criminals but I don't enjoy fighting drunk people for no reason.

I try to be always honest. I mean obviously that's not always possible. But whether I've got someone in the dock who I'm talking to, I always, I harbour no ill will to criminals or anything. The court can punish them.

c. Cultural Negotiations

NSWPFF coexists with the broad and complex multi-cultural communities that they serve. This can present at once unique opportunities, and challenging barriers, for officers to negotiate as they understand and respond to divergent and variable cultural needs and expectations of those in their communities. Some officers discussed the need to understand the realities of cultural differences in the communities they worked with, and to recognise the challenges that accompanied doing that.
Cultural issues with Indigenous Australians was also raised, as were the challenges of NSW Police working with Aboriginal Communities, both in city and regional locations.

For those who raised these issues, negotiating effectively with Aboriginal communities was seen as something that was not always explicitly supported by NSWPF workplace culture (as opposed to the formal NSWPF organisation). Officers making these claims also suggested that for them to engage in productive cultural negotiations with Aboriginal (and other ethnic) communities on behalf of NSWPF could be potentially damaging to their own career advancement, because of organisational cultural norms still existing that might undermine such initiatives. In some instances, perceptions of ‘career retribution’ were also mentioned.

One officer who worked closely with Indigenous people while working for NSWPF believed that he had succeeded in building a reciprocal trust relationship with the Indigenous community at his location and confirmed his feelings of respect for that community to be sincere:

I have a really close working relationship with the Aboriginal community .... I respect a lot of, the absolute lot of them. I'd like to think that I've worked pretty hard and got that respect too back from, you know that section of the community. It's only the minority that causes us a lot of grief, as in with everything.

This respect had been reportedly recognised by Indigenous Elders and community members in some rare and significant displays of mutual respect and acceptance. Evidence of enhanced community relations with various ethnic groups, including Indigenous Australians, should not be underestimated given the often tenuous and highly troubled relations that have existed in the past between NSWPF and non-Caucasian community groups, and which continue in some pockets of the media and police organisations. Trust between NSWPF Officers and Indigenous communities being strained from time to time, was also confirmed during interviews:

A place like ... puts a lot of strain on police. It's a very demanding ... community. It's a political melting pot.

Given the ongoing and growing need for NSWPF to support, interact with, and be sensitive to the multitude of ethnic minorities that exist in Australian (and NSW) society, interactions between NSWPF and varying cultural groups and communities might warrant further specific examination, beyond the particular research focus of this project.

d. Good Days, Bad Days

When asked, interviewees in the pilot program could all clearly articulate what a ‘good day’ looked like for them, and what also constituted a ‘bad day’. Interviewees related their views through sharing their personal feelings, intrinsic motivations, meanings, and beliefs. Echoing the idea of what constituted a ‘good cop and bad cop’, the idea of what a ‘good day’ was made up was found to be one that did not require dealing with traumatic policing tasks, as well as the smooth running of organisational processes and procedures, all of which can be dependent on individual officers as well as NSWPF’s organisational policies. Often, when an officer described a ‘good day’ they were articulating their process of being fully engaged with their work, where the task at hand meets their personal and professional skills and did not extend them unreasonably beyond this. Positive psychology researchers would have described them as being in a state of “flow”, as noted earlier:
Yeah, not flooded but just enough people to share the role but at the same time having enough to keep you...just busy all day rather than looking for something to do, or swamped and you feel overwhelmed.

Their focus was also supported by knowing their work task had purpose and meaning, which would have been enhanced by trust in colleagues and the organisation, sufficient information about the task at hand, and knowing they were always going to be supported:

Knowing that I've made a difference in at least something and that I've focused on something. I like finding something that I care about to move forward with. I like busy, being very busy and productive.

Officers also raised the issue of belonging and how this served the group achievement positively. Being able to focus on the task at hand reportedly required being supported by that individual’s own competencies, but also the competence of the workplace support system they hoped was surrounding them. For some, rather than just being busy, a day without turmoil was considered a good day; a day without drama:

The day when you turn up, you have nothing, no major issues raised throughout the day. Everyone gets through the day where we've been able to achieve all our tasks and everything with no great problems. I want a day that's nice and easy, so to speak, where there's no major drama either internal or external, anywhere. They're the good days that you enjoy in the cops.

When the larger purpose is served and officers feel like they have achieved what is seen as a common goal, then some confirmed that, for them, a “good day” had occurred:

But I feel like there's a bigger goal. As long as a community gets along ... because you're never going to get rid of crime. You're never going to get rid of unhappy days for the public. But minimising that and making it as good as a shitty situation can be. If you get that done, I think that's a good day.

Significant comments were also made about team work, camaraderie and feeling like a valued member of the organisation that contributed to a “good day”. Not only did such circumstances positively influence peoples’ communication with one another but they also reflected a level of trust that was reportedly needed, and desirable, in a collegial, productive workplace.

Just to and from jobs and working with someone that you're comfortable talking to and just being around. There's no awkwardness. No one that has any issues with the organisation at the moment that you know stops you conversing. Or just normal idle chit chat really

For senior staff, a “good day” turned emphasised the organisation being able to do what it was trying to do; reduce the level of crime. Importantlly, the view of this senior officer was that other officers in NSWPFF stayed safe while doing their job, feeling happy to come to work and feeling supported in the work that they were doing:

No major incidents of crime. And, whatever I may have set myself to achieve or be working on, be actually able to achieve that .... I suppose a good day for me, is everybody turning up, going home, how they turned up, not injured and happy to come to work, feeling supported, knowing they support my staff.
On the other hand, a “bad day” could also be readily brought to mind. For some, it was about the internal machinations of the organisation not going well. The “bad day” was often said to include workplace conflict, and negative workplace behaviours:

A bad day in the workplace for me would be discontent for some of the negative type behaviours that people can have to each other in the workplace...A bad day in the office for me would be all of that negative type of behaviour and negative type of goings on within the workplace.

A “bad day” was reported by another officer as being when they felt that one of their colleagues was being attacked unfairly within the organisation:

I get really territorial, especially with people I work with. I'll always stick up for them. If I see someone attacking them, or see them going through stuff, that would probably count to being a bad day.

Often, and unsurprisingly, a “bad day” also involved operational stress, and trauma, and included unpleasant incidents experienced in the line of duty, especially those that involved children:

I've probably seen upwards of 100-plus dead bodies. Some get to you and there are some people that go, “Oh yeah, I just want to see it. I want to see it.” These days, I'll go, well, “Look, I've seen hundreds. I prefer not to, I guess, but if I have to, I have to.” ... Probably kids have been the worst part of my career, that sort of thing. So I understand why people have certain triggers and that sort of thing.

But the ones that have really affected me have been anything to do with children. I've had to go to three significant child deaths over my career, of kids, say between five and one. The unfortunate thing was, at each time, I've had a child of similar age and that has had a real dramatic effect. It just makes you really appreciate what you've got a lot more. But also you just also really feel for the loss that the parents are going through when they do it. Especially when it's something that's just come out of the blue. That really does affect you greatly.

It's never fun turning up to a domestic, especially now with kids. Now that I've got my own it's all the more real.

We reported ideas around “good” and “bad” days because they suggested further insights into what officers believed were challenging, or supportive, for their wellbeing and resilience at work. Clear and unsurprising areas of stress and strain – both operational and organisational – featured in their commentary. What can also be inferred from this early evidence is that the NSWP can influence many of these outcomes for officers. They can’t always control events that feature in “good” and “bad” days, but they can have a significant and positive influence on how the organisation, and its members, respond to those days so that officers feel supported and their wellbeing is not undermined.
OBJECTIVE 4: IDENTIFY COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

Finding Collaborative Solutions

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Table 8: Finding Collaborative Solutions

a. Key Messages from the Research

The final section of this Pilot Study Qualitative Research Report involves UWS finding collaborative solutions with NSWPF. We remain keen to ensure that any suggested solutions and recommendations made, are done so in concert with experts and experienced officers in NSWPF.

So, to commence this important dialogue between UWS researchers and NSWPF, we have framed below some key messages that we believe can be learned from this exploratory research. The points presented below have been drawn directly from what was reported to us in the qualitative phase of the Pilot Study. Below, we are endeavouring to reflect what NSWPF officers told us and that might prove beneficial for NSWPF to act on.

We remind readers that the findings in this Pilot Study Report are exploratory and require further work, and that some of the data presented has been necessarily edited, and demographic data removed, to protect the confidentiality of participants. As indicated in the Introduction to this report, some texts have been de-identified by removing demographic details and content that may identify the person speaking, including (but not limited to): length of tenure; location; rank and/or job title; and specific remarks made that may identify the speaker. However, as the qualitative study continues and more LAC’s can be included, the sample of officers interviewed at different levels and in different locations will expand, and we will be more able to include salient demographic characteristics.

Key Messages

- Some officers reported that how officers were treated by management -- eg being disrespected, abused, sworn at, or professionally undermined -- was a frequent reason for staff at all levels, and tenure, to leave the organisation. Mention was made, several times, of vindictive managers being present in NSWPF.

- Frequently reported was a mismatch between individuals’ expectations of what police work, and working with NSWPF, would be (prior to joining), compared to how they viewed the organisation, and police work, after joining NSWPF. This was noted by new recruits, but also some longer serving officers who were able to comment on this, having been with the organisation for some years. This would suggest the need to re-align community expectations with the realities of police work, and expectations in the NSWPF organisation.
• New recruits spoke of feeling “lost”, and not necessarily being given sufficient direction in what they were supposed to be doing by senior officers. They also spoke of not knowing how the organisation worked, who to align themselves with, and how to otherwise get settled in a large, complex, political organisation such as NSWPF. This would suggest a need for mentoring programs being introduced (if not already available), both informal and/or formal, within the organisation. If already present, such programs perhaps need review.

• The need for trust in doing police work was frequently reported as needing to be very high, and in numerous directions and between numerous stakeholders. Police officers reported needing, and desiring, high levels of trust: between officers and senior managers; between colleagues at similar levels working in teams; between police officers and the public they served; and between police officers at all levels and the organisation itself. Trust was identified as crucially being needed and, when it was absent, as contributing to a host of problems for individuals, and throughout the operation of the organisation.

• Police reported feeling surveilled in their work, by many stakeholders within and outside the organisation, and that they felt this placed great pressure on them when doing their duties; they felt they were always being ‘watched’ and ‘judged’. They also felt that, given this high level of surveillance, from many quarters, that making a mistake that could result in a trouble, for themselves, and for the organisation, was highly likely and of concern. This surveillance was reported by them as coming from: other police; the NSWPF organisation; the media; the community; and, the NSW Ombudsman. There are possibly other sources of surveillance not identified in this exploratory pilot study that may further contribute to officer concerns. Questions of trusting the organisation to support them given their perception of exposure and vulnerability also arose in connection with these high levels of surveillance.

• A major problem identified by this exploratory research was that, while officers noted that NSWPF had put in place numerous measures intended to support officers with psychological injury, and to assist officers’ return to work after extended medical or stress leave, that many of these procedures and processes were having unintended, negative effects and outcomes for all involved (managers administering them, and officers accessing them). It was frequently reported that officers knew of the various support avenues available to them by NSWPF, especially those pertinent to psychological injury and recovery, but avoided using them, deliberately. Reasons cited for this seemed to point to the organisational culture of NSWPF, including the unhelpful operationalization of some of its formal and informal procedures, as well as officers reporting being shamed and humiliated if they showed weakness, and/or accessed any of the formal services available to help them. Reports of feeling shamed and humiliated were also found to have exacerbated and extended any experiences of individual trauma through dealing with the internal procedures (or their aftermath) that were intended to assist. Significantly, concerns were raised by officers who felt that any involvement with these processes could also have a deleterious impact on their
continuing career, and future trajectory in the organisation. These unintended outcomes may well go towards explaining why, when officers go on any kind of stress- or psychological injury-related leave, they rarely returned to active (or any other) duties with NSWPF but exited the organisation permanently, taking their skills and experience with them.

- The exodus of junior staff from NSWPF, as well as the high numbers of staff on medical, disability or stress leave at any given time (including those leaving the organisation after extended medical or stress leave, or who may have left due to misaligned expectations as to what the job entailed), especially the more experienced officers, was also regarded as a significant loss by officers throughout the organisation, at all levels, not just management. The loss of skills and experience at all levels was considered to be a problem by many of the officers interviewed, one that was placing considerable burden on those who remained in the NSWPF having to continue their work and deal with serious operational issues, as required by the job, but with insufficient staff, or inexperienced staff to support them. We are aware that NSWPF management knows of the loss of staff, and the high numbers on disability and stress leave. What NSWPF management may not be aware of is how seriously officers at all levels of the organisation view the situation. They may also not have realised how much staff speak of avoiding the support processes that are currently being made available to support them.

- Officers interviewed found it extremely beneficial to be able to share their experiences, especially those traumatic ones they had encountered, with a supportive, trusted colleague. Several officers spoke directly of problems that pointed to them having a psychological injury that was very helpfully responded to through such conversations with peers and mentor figures that they trusted in the organisation. We are not suggesting that the formal processes currently in place to support officers be reduced but perhaps that some kind of informal or formal mentoring, or discussion, program be commenced that would facilitate opportunities for sharing, between peers and colleagues, and especially between very experienced, longer-tenured officers and less experienced ones, and in a trusting and confidential environment, to supplement the current role of formal counselling and other EAP services now offered by the organisation. Some officers simply did not wish to access formal counselling services and a more informal approach being encouraged and made available internally, perhaps in an informal setting outside the walls of NSWPF LACs, would assist.

- Officers spoke at length of the problems of negative group dynamics and their potential outcomes within NSWPF. They spoke at length of cliques, camps, groups, as well as the prevalence of gossip and rumour (and alongside a shortage of formalised communiques to provide accurate information, where that was appropriate), and how damaging all these negative workplace phenomena could be. Several also remarked about how poor choices early in one’s career as to the “camp” or “clique” one chose could have detrimental impacts on their career.
• Officers interviewed also noted the challenges for NSWPF in responding to the needs of various multi-cultural constituent groups in the community, including Indigenous Australians.

b. Recommendations and Future Research

As noted earlier, the UWS team are keen to work in concert with NSWPF in formulating collaborative solutions. The findings presented here, including the Key Messages shared above, are exploratory and preliminary, but many of them point towards areas that the organisation can reasonably respond to, in the short- and longer term. We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with NSWPF in determining the best way to respond. In the meantime, we make these initial recommendations.

Recommendations

• That the recently awarded ARC Research, especially the qualitative components, continues to further explore key areas identified during this pilot study.

• That a longitudinal study involving regular, face to face interviews with new recruits, and perhaps also including officers at different tenure levels and stages of their careers, be commenced as soon as practicable. Such a study would ideally involve regular data collection points, and follow the career and personal trajectories of those identified on a regular basis, especially and to include those who went on any kind of extended leave, or who left the organisation. Such a longitudinal study could be conducted at agreed data collection intervals (eg annually, or at two year intervals), depending on the needs of NSWPF and the details of what they would wish to track, and why. Such research would offer valuable insights into what new recruits, and more established officers think, how they respond, and the choices they make with their careers within NSWPF, and over many years. It is recommended that work of this nature continue, for maximum benefit, for several decades to advance understandings of police officers’ and NSWPF’s needs, well into the future.

• Such a longitudinal study would hold even greater value if conducted concurrently with another state of Australia (eg Victoria, or South Australia), and/or another comparative cultural nation state location elsewhere in the world (eg USA, New Zealand, or UK). Once again, such a study would have greatest impact if continued for several decades into the future.

• That NSWPF consider doing a cultural audit of the organisation, on a regular basis (perhaps annually, or every second year) to measure and identify areas of concern within the culture and climate of NSWPF. This would enable the organisation to respond to problematic organisational cultural characteristics, including what seems to be emerging as a key issue in this pilot study: officers needing formalised support for their psychological injuries, choosing not to access those currently on offer by NSWPF due to fear of being shamed,
humiliated, otherwise stigmatised, and their future careers being negatively affected as a result. Currently planned surveys (via ARC Linkage grant with UWS and ACU) are intended for another purpose, to gather data to build resilience and wellbeing of officers via positive psychology science and associated interventions.

- That a review of police management communication and other managerial styles and processes be carefully considered by NSWPF. Research involving observational work, including “shadowing” senior officers, is recommended as it might assist in pinpointing problem areas, people, LACs and disrespectful behaviour. It might also enable the highlighting and recording of what excellent senior managers are doing that is different when compared to those who are less well respected by staff.

- That research be also conducted in the NSW community that NSWPF services, targeting possible and prospective new recruits, as well as school children and their parents, to learn how NSWPF is currently perceived and, especially, what community members and aspiring recruits believe police work entails. If there is a major mismatch between community expectations and the reality of modern police work, perhaps some advertising or other informational work might be carried out to remedy these misaligned expectations. This would also enable a re-alignment of the expectations of new recruits entering the organisation so they could have a more realistic appraisal of what police operational work, and working with NSWPF, might entail. This reported mismatch of expectations arose in a number of interviews and seemed to point to a major reason why shorter tenure officers might be leaving the organisation prematurely.

- That processes surrounding complaints handling and NSW Police legislation be investigated further during the upcoming ARC qualitative interviews, with a recommendation of possible review of associated NSWPF administrative complaints handling procedures being considered.

- That NSWPF continue tracking staff leave taking, and medical retirement statistics. The remediation of this problem will be discussed with researchers throughout the progress of the ARC grant, recently awarded to UWS and ACU, to ensure that solutions developed be jointly be aligned with NSWPF management needs and expectations.

- That the existence of negative workplace behaviours, by officers at all levels in the organisation, needs to be responded to by NSWPF. Seminars and training intended to inform officers, not just of what negative behaviours are, and what they may look like, but the significant and deleterious outcomes that manifest from them if they are left to continue in a workplace unchecked. Bullying, for instance, is a widely misunderstood term, with serious consequences for all those caught up in it, with few understanding its serious nature, nor the misconceptions and flawed assumptions that exist pertaining to it. Evidence of the existence of continuing negative workplace behaviours, as presented in this report, would suggest that there remains potential for psychological injury to still happen to officers within
NSWPF as they go about their working day. Seminars addressing the nature of bullying, harassment, and incivility are recommended to inform officers of the nature of these behaviours, and to dispel the many myths surrounding them.

- This research has presented exploratory findings suggesting that further investigation of the some of the complexities of multi-cultural communities might be worthwhile. This could include NSWPF finding ways to work more closely with multi-cultural communities of all kinds, and including communities of Indigenous Australians in particular.

- That senior officers in NSWPF be encouraged to find ways and means to speak informally with other officers, at all ranks, to share their past traumatic experiences, in ways that show other officers their experiences with them, and their understanding. These could be via small internal organisational talks, seminars, facilitated focus group meetings, or one-on-one meetings with junior officers present. In such sessions, officers at all levels (and especially new recruits and junior officers) could hear senior staff speak of such events so they might feel less alone. It would be useful for staff in NSWPF to hear senior officers acknowledge and speak of publicly the trauma, shock, sleeplessness, anxiety, loss, pain, grief or other mental health injuries that senior officers may have sustained – and recovered from – earlier in their long and successful careers.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


