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The Perceived Impact of Peer Support in Addressing Burnout

Among 911 Emergency Dispatchers

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Requirement for the degree
Doctor of Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

The Perceived Impact of Peer Support in Addressing Burnout

Among 911 Emergency Dispatchers

By Pauline L. Soria

A 911 emergency dispatcher encounters stressful situations and is known to manage life-endangering incidents by way of telephone and/or radio. As dispatchers are trained to assist the public and the field units, the job they do may result in their own suffering of emotional or psychological trauma as they hear the sufferings of others. It is time the dispatchers learn good coping mechanisms, find ways to help alleviate the stress of the job, and help themselves realize that what they may be feeling is a normal result from an abnormal situation. The researcher based this dissertation on emotional labor theory. As public servants, dispatchers are taught to suppress their own emotions in order to align with the culture of the department they work for and the public they serve. This can become stressful for the dispatcher and if not dealt with properly can lead to burnout or worse. Literature provides information about the benefits a peer support program can be to those who work in stressful situations. Being able to speak to someone who understands the job they do and who can relate in a nonformal setting has been known to be beneficial. This dissertation is generally seeking to understand the relationship between peer support programs and burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. The study utilized a nonexperimental quantitative research study design. This was done to locate a connection, if there is one, between a peer support program, the perceived effectiveness, and the impact it has in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers.

Keywords: dispatch, emotional exhaustion, emotional labor, burnout

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To my work family, RSO dispatchers ROCK! The job you do is so important, and I wish each of you knew how meaningful you are to law enforcement. You are the *first of the first* responders. Hold your heads up high, you are not *JUST* a dispatcher, you are *A DISPATCHER*; each one of you is unique and awesome to the job you do.

Finally, to my CBU classmates. Thank you for being such a great support system. You have been such a blessing. We did it!

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to a great man who is my partner, my best friend, my rock, my love, my husband, David P. Soria. It was he who encouraged me to persevere, believed in me, knew when to let me vent, held me when I needed to cry, set aside his dream of getting a degree so I could finish my degree, and has been there for me every step of the way. I love you *MORE!* To my kids, Paul, Ariel, and Alyssa, thank you for being understanding during the times I had to cancel or shorten family time. To my precious grandbabies, Audrey, Holley, Aiden, Genevieve, and James, Grammie loves you so much. I pray you all realize that God is your strength and to lean on Him for all things. LOVE YOU MORE!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Emergency service providers who interact by telephone, also called 911 emergency dispatchers, manage life-endangering incidents. They encounter situations that require them to recommend and even act while communicating, which may result in their own suffering—emotional or psychological trauma—as they hear the sufferings of others. Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is the stress that results from wanting to help a traumatized person, which, by definition, encompasses the work of call takers and dispatchers (Turner, 2015).

As mentioned, dispatchers are known to want to help callers and law enforcement personnel in the field who are in immediate grips of a life-threatening medical incident and/or life-threatening crime in progress. Emergency dispatchers are in a unique position of having to listen to the traumatic experiences of others while at work (Latter, 2003). Dispatchers are often required to listen to horrific pleas for help. The dispatcher must make quick decisions while taking specific action and engaging the caller or the police field unit in ways that may have a negative impact on their personal, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Marshall and Laorenza (2018) explained how dispatchers need to be able to bridge “the messy reality to the official world” (p. 17), by depending on their ability to be patient, empathetic, skilled, and decisive conversationalists who control the phone communication. Emergency dispatchers, while not responding physically on the scene, vicariously experience the stress and trauma from the beginning of the phone call to 911 (LaPorte, Sweifach, & Linzer, 2010). Dispatchers are trained to care for the public and the emergency field units but may not be well trained on self-care.

Rasmussen (2015) mentioned that emergency dispatchers do not address their own health and well-being while facing life and death emergencies and trauma via telephone or radio on a consistent basis. Dispatchers are expected to be resilient, going from one call to the next or handling one incident after another on the radio. The difference between police officers and dispatchers while at work is that officers have the ability to physically process their stress (Beaton & Murphy, 1995; Garrett, 2001). The law enforcement officer is able to get out of his or her police unit and walk away from the immediate incident. Whereas, the dispatcher is not capable of walking away from a radio console unless he or she is relieved by a coworker. Nor are the dispatchers capable of leaving a phone console because they must be available to answer the next phone call, which means they may hear another tragic incident. The dispatcher is less apt to shut off the production of stress hormones from prior calls (Marshall & Laorenza, 2018). Frequently, there is not an opportunity after a critical incident for the dispatcher to be able to take a deep breath, debrief an incident with a coworker, or simply consider what just occurred. Instead, the dispatcher must handle the next call and/or incident.

Do not misunderstand the researcher's point in comparing the law enforcement officer in the field to the dispatcher. Research continues to show that police work is one of the most stressful occupations and is related to increased rates of heart disease, divorce, sick days, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, acute stress disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Levenson, 2016). The comparison is to simply address the dispatcher's lack of self-care after handling a critical incident. Williams (2017) believed that in order to increase resiliency, decrease mental health symptoms, and prevent suicide, there must be a shift in culture that allows for safety in discussing what occurs in

the aftermath of trauma. The dispatch *culture* tells dispatchers that they will be fine, they need to answer 911's in a timely manner, they cannot unplug from the console, they are the caller's lifeline, and so on. Rick Barton, who is the spokesman for the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, which trains first responders in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), mentioned that law enforcement culture says, "I can handle it, I've got this" (Doornbos, 2016, para. 13). Levenson (2016) mentioned that the culture of the law enforcement officer is that of emphasizing toughness and a shrug-it-off, suck-it-up mentality, which forces officers to keep their feelings to themselves. The culture that conditions law enforcement to be strong and stoic does not give permission for the normal human response to the tragedies they are exposed to (Williams, 2017).

The intention of this researcher was to find a connection, if there is one, between a peer support program and the impact it has in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers. Until the research was conducted, it was unknown whether a peer support program makes a difference in addressing burnout for the dispatchers. It would be advantageous for a department to want to prevent burnout within their employees. Employee burnout can affect workers' health, motivation, and job performance and speed staff turnover (McCarty & Skogan, 2013). Burnout is increasingly costly in human and economic terms. In order to *burn out*, a person needs to have been on fire at one time (Guy, Newman, & Mastracci, 2015). To be *on fire* means for the dispatchers to have been engaged and excited about their job. Dispatchers who are invested and truly care about their job are the individuals who find themselves being affected.

The researcher is aware that the job of the dispatcher is stressful because she has worked within a local law enforcement department for over 21 years. At the time of this study, she was a senior dispatcher working alongside the dispatchers answering calls for service and assisting the field units. She was mindful of the issues that can arise with dispatchers who are not getting the proper help after taking stressful calls or being the dispatcher on the other side of the radio when a field unit calls out for help. The researcher has had her share of stressful situations and is aware of the signs of burnout. However, with found knowledge of understanding how to cope with stress, learning about resiliency, and confiding in her peers, she has been able to recover and not become burned out herself. The researcher has been able to acknowledge and remind herself of the reasons she chose the career of becoming a dispatcher. The researcher was able to relate to the dispatchers and provide insight into what many of them may have been dealing with from her own experiences.

More and more, research validates what those who have worn a headset have known for years—911 dispatchers experience stress, both cumulative and traumatic, as a result of their work (Perin, 2016). A high level of stress can overload and break down a person's physical and mental systems (Weibel, Gabrion, Aussedat, & Kreutz, 2003). Prolonged exposure to occupational stress has also been correlated with exhaustion, which is defined as fatigue, demoralization, and irritability (Yoo & Franke, 2010). This can affect the quality of life both at work and home if not cared for in a proper way. Addressing the stresses of the job and finding ways to help alleviate the stress before it reaches burnout can be beneficial.

Background of the Problem

Because dispatchers are public servants, it is important that they conduct themselves as professionals, providing a service to the public that aligns with their department policy and procedures. Because of the job that the dispatcher performs, it is not always easy for them to not feel overwhelmed, stressed, and experience possible burnout. Therefore, exploring peer support programs to evaluate whether a program can assist in helping dispatchers who become overwhelmed, stressed, and reach burnout or worse, being diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), would be beneficial for the dispatchers. Research has established a relationship between burnout and traumatic experiences (Sondergaard, Arno, Haglund, Perski, & Lundberg, 2004), including such factors as PTSD (Brattberg, 2006). Greater peritraumatic emotional distress has been especially implicated in risk for the development of PTSD (Brunet et al., 2001; Karam et al., 2010; Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003).

Burnout is a response to prolonged stressors at work and is defined as a chronic syndrome including exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). More research would benefit not only the dispatchers but also the law enforcement department. Burnout can negatively affect an individual's personal life, as well as employers, in terms of decreased work quality, patient/client satisfaction, and employee retention (Johnstone et al., 2016). The dispatcher's decisions affect the citizens and the field units they serve. The impact of burnout for a law enforcement agency can be hazardous. Pines, Aronson, and Kafry (1981) described burnout as a state of both physical and emotional exhaustion, which may produce maladaptive coping mechanisms to stressful working conditions, also discussed in Sprang, Clark, and Whitt-Woosley,

(2007). Burnout associated with those professions dealing with human or people services was defined by Maslach and Jackson (1981) as a multidimensional condition consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion has been linked to poor job performance and poor work-life balance (Naz, Gul, & Haq, 2011). Depersonalization is now known as the cynicism dimension (Maslach, 2017). Maslach (2017) described it as “having a negative or inappropriate attitude towards clients, having become irritable, lost idealism, and withdrawn” (pp. 143-144). Preventing burnout and finding a balance between the responsibilities of work and home can be challenging but necessary.

Research has indicated that work-life conflict may decrease satisfaction with life and job satisfaction (Naz et al., 2011). Failing to achieve a balance between the demands of work and personal responsibilities to family or society has been shown to increase levels of stress and stress-related illnesses (Hobson, Delunas, & Kesic, 2001). When the quality of work for a dispatcher is compromised, it can decrease empathy, decrease callousness, and hinder communication skills (Guy et al., 2015). Empathy and communication skills are needed by emergency dispatchers to serve the citizens and field units to the best of their ability. Studies have shown that employees who report an equitable balance between the demands of work and family often report improved mental and physical health (Frone, Russel, & Barnes, 1996). Providing knowledge about resources that are available such as peer support and what burnout consists of might be the first step needed into directing dispatchers in balancing their home and work life.

Training is not a main focus within this dissertation; however, it is purposeful for the reader to have some knowledge and an understanding of what is required by the

emergency dispatcher. Dispatchers train to help the public and the field units.

Dispatchers are good at what they do, helping others. Training in helping themselves or one another is minimal, if any at all. Training among 911 emergency dispatch centers varies by state. The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) provides a list of states that require training certification. Of 51 states, 26 have legislative required training, and the hours vary dependent upon the state. Some states range from 232 training hours to as low as 16 required training hours (APCO, n.d.). These hours certify that the individual is qualified per their state as an emergency dispatcher. The State of California requires 120 hours of training for an individual to become certified as a public safety dispatcher (APCO, n.d.).

The California Code of Regulations, Title 11, states under Section 1018, Public Safety Dispatcher Programs (c): “(1) Every public safety dispatcher shall satisfactorily complete the POST-certified Public Safety Dispatchers’ Basic Course as set forth within 12 months after the date of the public safety dispatcher position; or possess the Public Safety Dispatcher Certificate” (para. 3). The required 120 training hours is broken down into 14 individual specific learning domains. The one domain that has any relevance toward wellness is domain 113, Wellness Management, which is a 4-hour course. The learning need states that in order to effectively carry out their responsibilities, dispatchers need a basic knowledge of how-to assess and maintain their mental and physical health and well-being and to be aware of available resources (Cappitelli, 2011). The learning objectives are defining stress, symptoms of stress, potential sources of stress, short-term and long-term effects of stress, techniques in promoting wellness, and resources. Peer support is a topic and resource that instructors should be mentioning along with

additional resources. However, peer support is not a required topic addressed by that of the instructor.

Part 2 of Section 1018 (c) states that “every public safety dispatcher, and public safety dispatch supervisor, shall also satisfactorily complete” additional 24 hours of training within a Continuing Professional Training (CPT) cycle (POST, 2018, para. 3). The additional 24 hours of training are required of the public safety dispatcher and/or public safety supervisor to maintain his or her certificate. These hours need to be completed within a 2-year period, and the courses consist of several topics that POST certifies and a department can choose from. The state-required, 120-hour Public Safety Dispatchers’ Basic Course can be taken by law enforcement agency employees or anyone willing to pay. The course follows the needs of the POST requirements; however, it is not specific to any one law enforcement agency. Law enforcement agencies all differ in policy and procedures. Therefore, it would be difficult and time consuming to address each agency within the State of California. Individuals who are either sent to the course by their hired agency or individuals who pay to take the course still need specific training to gain an understanding about their specific agencies’ policies and procedures. As a new hire, it would depend upon the agency in how they conduct their training. Agencies take it upon themselves to determine if an in-house type of training needs to be conducted per their department policy and procedures. These agencies provide their own training domains and material that are specific to their individual emergency dispatch center. As the researcher continues her study on the impact of peer support in addressing burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers, the results may be useful for other departments

dependent upon the outcome. Training is what lays the foundation for each emergency dispatcher. Agencies need to realize the importance of it.

The importance of researching the impact of a peer support program in addressing burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers is to provide support to the individual dispatcher as needed. As research is conducted into the mental and physical stability of the emergency dispatcher, agencies can evaluate whether their department needs assistance in making changes. As public servants, it is vital that dispatchers follow the mission of their agency. The dispatchers' conduct reflects upon the agency they represent; therefore, a need would be to find ways of coping with the stresses they deal with because of the job. The intensity and criticalness of emergency dispatch work captures a level of complexity that is not found in other service jobs (Guy et al., 2015). Lack of resiliency with what is dealt with over the phone, at the center, and in the dispatcher's personal life may lead the dispatcher in becoming susceptible to burnout. Simply put, burnout is a condition that affects individuals in emergency-helping professions who experience the long-term, chronic stress that comes from the responsibility of providing assistance to those in need (Turner, 2017). Turner (2017) mentioned that getting to the point of being burned out is a process that happens slowly over an extended period of time, so much so that dispatchers do not notice the warning signs until the dispatcher is near or over capacity for handling stress.

As dispatchers come to realize that they can and may become susceptible to stress, which leads to burnout, they can begin to reach out and accept needed assistance, such as peer support. According to Marshall and Laorenza (2018), "Peer support is not a substitute for professional counseling but serves to defuse stress and staff conflicts while

encouraging people to move toward responsible solutions and professional therapy assistance as needed” (p. 230). As previously stated by Williams (2017), the culture that conditions law enforcement is to be strong and stoic. These individuals need to realize that enduring the stress of the job does not need to be handled alone. Showing one’s feelings just demonstrates that the individual is human and has empathy for those he or she serves. Expressing these feelings with a peer, rather than going to a professional, may be what the individual needs. A peer support program is really a statement that an agency values its employees’ psychological health, and it wants to create a program that supports their psychological well-being (Perin, 2016). The goal of the department should not be to judge the employee for his or her need in help or to determine if the need is authentic. The goal should be to recognize and provide resources for those employees who may be seriously in need of help.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness in existing peer support programs and their connection, if there is one, in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers.

Research was conducted among dispatchers from three separate sheriff department agencies within California. This provided an ample number of participants to increase the validity of this study. Providing research from three separate agencies within California allows the reader to understand that the issue is not secluded to a specific dispatch center. It was imperative that the researcher validate her information and not show a skewed viewpoint. The results of the research may deliver direction into further

exploration of an implemented peer support program for law enforcement agencies across California.

The researcher collaborated with personal contacts within the three agencies who she has met during her 21-year career as a 911 emergency dispatcher. The personal contacts were forwarded the invitation to participate via e-mail to the emergency dispatchers within their agency. The researcher was dependent on each personal contact to assist in endorsing and encouraging his or her emergency dispatchers to participate in taking the survey. The survey measured burnout among the participants as well as their perception of their department's peer support program. As the findings may differ dependent upon the department, the researcher had a collective amount of data to analyze from the three departments based upon their thoughts of their department's peer support program. Although the researcher was not planning to compare one agency's peer support program to the other, she reported the findings in their entirety. These differences can be perceived as subjective; what works for one agency may or may not work for the next agency, dependent upon the participant's perception. The researcher located several qualities that have been known to be effective for other law enforcement agencies' peer support programs. The information was obtained from the agencies' peer support program policy and is included in the researcher's methodology section. The qualities were included in the survey that the researcher provided to the participants. Participants chose the level of effectiveness for each quality based upon their perception. The intentions of the researcher were to publish her findings to make information available for other agencies. Various agencies can determine whether their department could benefit from the information in creating a healthy work environment. Perin (2016)

explained how departments need to realize that a peer support team is not just available during critical incidents. A good peer support team will spend most of their time allowing those in need to lean on them. Then, when the big incident occurs, peers will know and be willing for the peer support team to help handle those incidents as well. The International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Officer Safety and Wellness (2018), in its report, *The Signs Within: Suicide Prevention Education and Awareness*, expounded on the issue of peer support programs being an active part of an agency. The accomplishment or failure of a peer support program often depends on the worth that the agency's administration places on the program. It is essential that the peer support team members receive ongoing and continued training for themselves in order to serve their peers to the best of their ability. Equipping the peer support team with ongoing training will assist the program in remaining effective.

In addition to gaining information on peer support programs, the researcher also utilized a study that reaches out to dispatchers in measuring their level of burnout. Maslach (2016), a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and an American social psychologist, is known for her research on occupational burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was utilized in conducting research in measuring burnout among the dispatchers who were willing to participate. The most widely used instrument is the MBI-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS); it is the original version of the MBI designed for professionals who work in human services and whose focus on helping others. According to Maslach, the MBI-HSS instrument addressed three scales: (a) emotional exhaustion (measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work), (b) depersonalization (measures an unfeeling and impersonal

response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction), and (c) personal accomplishment (measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work). The MBI was the first instrument utilized. A second instrument providing questions about peer support programs was administered directly after the first instrument, which was combined as one survey. The researcher's main focus was to locate a correlation between peer support and burnout. Can having a peer support program help alleviate burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers?

Research Questions

This is a quantitative study. Participants included 911 emergency dispatchers from three different counties within the State of California. The researcher contacted individuals she has made connections with over the 21 years of her public service career. Information was provided to these individuals introducing the study as well as asking these individuals to forward the study to the emergency dispatchers within their agency who met the criteria of the researcher. The following research questions were addressed within this dissertation:

1. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of emotional exhaustion?
2. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of depersonalization?
3. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of personal accomplishment?

Significance of the Problem

The job of an emergency dispatcher is stressful; therefore, having a way for dispatchers to learn how to cope with the emotional labor of the job can be beneficial. The emotional labor concept appeared in the sociological field and was first defined by Hochschild (2012) as the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display in exchange for a wage. The lineage of emotional labor theory (ELT) is rooted in social theories that seek to understand how macrolevel forces affect cognitions, emotions, and behaviors of individuals (Goffman, 1959; Hochschild, 2012; Marx, 1867/1906; Mead, 1934). The negative consequences of emotional labor emerge when an individual does not embrace the expectations imposed on him or her, yet is forced or compelled to engage in emotional displays consistent with those expectations (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Steinberg (1999) defined and compared emotional labor as relational work: “It involves managing the emotions of others to achieve a desired state of mind or a desired course of action in them” (p. 149). Being able to control the conversation with the public is important to gain an understanding of what is being reported as well as retrieving information for the law enforcement field unit.

The job of the 911 emergency dispatcher is to serve the public in the community he or she works. Therefore, dispatchers are held accountable for their actions, emotions, and how they handle a situation with the public and coworkers. Although dispatchers are heard and not seen, they still need to keep their composure as they speak to the public and their coworkers. When dealing with an emergency caller, the level of emotional work rises dramatically and is an important element to minimizing further harm or saving a life (Guy et al., 2015). The dispatcher needs to be able to compose his or her emotions to

provide the reporting party with the proper assistance he or she needs. Davis (2005) studied 911 call takers and found that “nearly every call that a 911 dispatcher deals with . . . prompts an emotional response” (p. 75). Dispatchers are trained to retrieve information from the caller to provide law enforcement field units with the proper information that is needed. During an emergency call, it could be life and death information the dispatcher needs from the caller, or the information could compromise the safety of the law enforcement field unit.

Emotional labor research has primarily focused on two regulation strategies: surface acting, which involves faking required emotions and suppressing felt emotions; and deep acting, which involves exerting effort to feel and express required emotions (Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013; Hochschild, 2012). Surface acting involves suppressing felt emotions and faking desired emotions. Employees engaging in surface acting adjust their expressions to comply with emotional expressions desired by the organization and to hide undesired emotions (Andela, Truchot, & Borteyrou, 2015). As the dispatcher handles calls for service or assists the field units, there are times when what the dispatchers hears is unpleasant. The dispatcher may need to utilize surface acting as he or she keeps his or her composure to handle the situation as per the department’s policy and procedures. Surface acting is positively linked to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Cheung, Tang, & Tang, 2011; Grandey, 2003; Grandey, Foo, Groth, & Goodwin, 2012; Kim, 2008; Pisaniello, Winefield, & Delfabbro, 2012; Totterdell & Holman, 2003; Yagil, Luria, & Gal, 2008). Deep acting is a form of emotional regulation.

The deep acting strategy occurs before the emotion arouses physiological and behavioral reactions (Andela et al., 2015). Deep acting leads the individual to change his or her display of emotion to match the required expression the individual needs to present. This may be a way for dispatchers to be able to control their feelings by changing their thought process when an incident arises. Some studies indicate a positive link between deep acting and emotional exhaustion, even though it is weaker than the link between surface acting and emotional exhaustion (Bono & Vey, 2005; Grandey, 2003; Holman, Martinez-iñigo, & Totterdell, 2008; Kim, 2008; Pisaniello et al., 2012; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). To some extent, a dispatcher may feel somewhat detached from his or her emotions because he or she suppresses them or redirects them to benefit the department.

Agencies train their dispatchers in what is needed to be an effective dispatcher, though it appears that there is a lack of acknowledgment placed upon the impact and emotional labor that the dispatchers go through and receive while doing their job. As previously stated from the APCO (2016) website, the State of California requires 120 hours of training for an individual to become certified as a Public Safety Dispatcher. Of the 120 training hours, 4 hours, which is very limited, are dedicated to wellness management. The learning objectives do define stress, symptoms of stress, potential sources of stress, short-term and long-term effects of stress, techniques in promoting wellness, and resources, which all are important for the dispatcher. Recognizing the meaning of stress and understanding how to reach out for assistance if needed because of the negative impact of the job would be beneficial to both the dispatcher and the department. Research was directed at exploring peer support programs among dispatch

centers in determining how effective the program has been among their employees as well as assisting in addressing burnout. Peer support provides an outlet for the frustrations and anguish that arise from emotional work (Guy et al, 2015). Who better knows the job of a dispatcher than a dispatcher. A structured peer support program that is guided by confidentiality can be a safe place for one who may be feeling overwhelmed due to the emotional labor of the job. Sokol and Fisher (2016), in their article, broke down the hardly reached into three domains: individual (psychological factors), demographic (socioeconomic status), and cultural-environmental (social network). Sokol and Fisher's study provided how effective a peer support program can be. Strategies were provided in ways to reach out and engage with individuals that one works with who may be hard to reach out to.

As emergency dispatchers answer phones from the public, they hear things that most individuals will never hear. Once the dispatcher takes the information and provides it to the officers in the field, the dispatcher nearly never gets closure to the incident that was just handled. Many times, dispatchers find themselves creating their own thoughts and feelings of what may have occurred. By doing this, dispatchers tend to create the worst possible scenarios. Adams, Shakespeare-Finch, and Armstrong (2014) indicated that substantial stress for emergency medical dispatchers (EMDs) was produced through both operational pressures and vicarious trauma. Dispatchers need a way to be able to talk about what may be affecting them after taking a traumatic call. By talking to their peers, they would realize they were not alone, which could reduce feelings of shame or second guessing and could be an outlet for processing the traumatic event (Evans, Pistrang, & Billings, 2013).

As members of a helping profession that is faced with the suffering of others, 911 dispatchers empathize with the people they are assisting (Rigden, 2009). As the dispatchers are subjected to the suffering of others, they also feel a form of satisfaction from their actions of assisting the reporting party. It is compassion satisfaction that keeps many 911 dispatchers in the hot seat shift after shift (Rigden, 2009). Suppressing their feelings as they assist others is not always the best thing for any individual. Creating a safe place to increase knowledge and talking about the impact of an incident can help contribute to increased perceptions of support, increase job satisfaction, and build resiliency (Williams, 2017). A peer supporter can be available for another dispatcher to vent to and can direct the dispatcher in getting professional assistance if needed while keeping confidentiality between the peer supporter and the dispatcher in need.

Creating an environment that allows the dispatcher to realize that the stresses he or she encounters are normal feelings because of the abnormal job he or she does may generate a sense of relief to the dispatcher. Once dispatchers are aware that these feelings are normal, it may alleviate some of the stress and reduce burnout among the dispatchers. Maslach (2017) wrote about the positive effects versus the negative effects of burnout, fixing the person versus fixing the job, and new ideas about solutions regarding burnout. By providing insight into these areas of burnout, individuals may gain a better understanding of how to deal with and how to change their mindset toward the stress of the job they do. If progress can be made toward that goal, and healthier workplaces promoted for everyone, then burnout will become less of an occupational hazard (Maslach, 2017).

Definitions of Terms

Burnout. Burnout is conceptualized as a psychological syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment, and perceptions of reduced personal accomplishment, resulting from exposure to chronic job stressors (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Burnout is a condition that affects individuals in the helping professions who experience the long-term, chronic stress that comes from the responsibility of providing assistance to those in need (Turner, 2017).

Compassion fatigue. Charles Figley first conceptualized the term of compassion fatigue in the 1990s, and he coined the term “cost of caring for those who suffer” (as cited in Andersen & Papazoglou, 2015, p. 661). In other words, apathy results from the constant demands of caring for others.

911 emergency dispatcher, emergency dispatcher, 911 dispatcher, telecommunicator, and dispatcher. One who answers 911 emergency calls from the public and dispatches requests to law enforcement field personnel.

Emotional armor. Ability to gird oneself against one’s own emotional response (Guy et al., 2015).

Emotional labor (EL). Employees who express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions at work (Robbins & Judge, 2011). The management of one’s own feelings as well as those of the other in order to get the job done (Guy et al., 2015). Many times, dispatchers need to set their emotions aside to get the job done. Emotional labor was conceptualized in the early 1980s by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2012) as occupational requirements that alienate workers from their

emotions. Emotional labor requires that workers suppress their private feelings in order to show the desirable work-related emotions (Guy et al., 2015).

Emotional rollercoaster. Levels of stress, feelings, and emotions that range back and forth from low to high and high to low. Smollan (2014) provided an understanding of emotional rollercoaster in his article, “Control and the Emotional Rollercoaster of Organizational Change.” The purpose of his study was to focus on identifying the emotions that arise over issues of control over organizational change, why it occurs, and what their consequences are for the organizational member. Negative emotions were evoked when participants sensed a lack of control, whereas positive emotions were reported for those able to exert control over outcomes. The metaphor of the rollercoaster effect of positive and negative emotions was specifically used by a number of participants (Smollan, 2014).

Peer support program. Coworkers supporting one another by providing knowledge, experience, emotional, social, or practical help. A peer supporter is one who is approachable, who can communicate with his or her coworker, listen to what is bothering him or her, and able to direct the coworker in getting further assistance if needed. Peer support may reduce the negative effects of social isolation by providing support that might not otherwise be available in the mental health system (Gidugu et al., 2015).

Public safety answering point (PSAP). Answering emergency and nonemergency calls from the public, allied agencies, and field units (APCO, n.d.).

Time-out. Being placed or placing oneself in a position away from others. Being alone.

Vicarious trauma. Transformation within the worker after being exposed to others' traumatic incidents. The concept of vicarious trauma focuses on cognitive effects of indirect exposure (Pearlman, 1996). Adams et al. (2014) explained that despite the emergency medical dispatcher's physical distance from the crisis scene, the dispatcher can experience vicarious trauma through acute and cumulative exposure to traumatic incidents and his or her perceived lack of control, which can expound feelings of helplessness.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduced the job of the 911 emergency dispatcher and how he or she answers calls for service as well as handles requests from field units. The researcher explained how dispatchers are trained to assist the citizens in the cities and counties they work for but lack in training of self-care. Dispatchers have been known to take the call for or handle one incident right after another, many times without realizing or understanding the stress of the incident they just handled. Dispatchers are expected to be resilient.

The background of the problem addressed how dispatchers are public servants; therefore, they need to be held to certain standards while assisting the citizens of the cities and county areas they work for. Because of the calls and incidents the dispatchers handle, they find themselves overwhelmed, stressed, and near burnout. The researcher explored the impact of peer support programs in addressing burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. As the researcher sought out agencies that have peer support programs, she gained knowledge in how the program impacts the dispatch center. The study also addresses levels of burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers nationwide. As

the researcher examined agencies with a peer support program, she also sought burnout among their dispatchers. In this study, the researcher pursued answers to the following research questions. The independent and dependent variables for the comparison are included in the following research questions:

1. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of emotional exhaustion?
2. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of depersonalization?
3. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of personal accomplishment?

Chapter 1 explained the significance of the problem, which included the stress of the job the dispatchers do. The emotional labor of the job is known to create stress that many times leads to burnout or worse, PTSD. The first step to preventing burnout is knowledge (Turner, 2017). The researcher would like to bring that knowledge to dispatch centers nationwide in assisting in the wellness and self-care of the 911 emergency dispatcher.

Chapter 2 provides the reader with an insight into the literature on which the researcher built her dissertation. The literature review focuses on exploring peer support and peer support programs, the need for them, and the purpose they can provide to dispatchers. The researcher provides an insight into the culture of dispatch and how it differs from a clerical job. Burnout was explained, how one reaches burnout, and how individuals can work on preventing burnout. The researcher provides the theoretical framework on which this study is based. An insight into and understanding of emotional

labor and the connection it has with 911 emergency dispatchers is provided for the reader.

Chapter 3 provides details on how the researcher rationale for utilizing a nonexperimental quantitative research study design. Chapter 3 also provides the purpose of the study, research methodology, research questions and hypotheses, participants, instruments that were utilized, data collection and data cleaning procedures, and limitations. Chapter 4 discusses and provides the research findings. Chapter 5 concludes the study providing findings, limitations, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As the researcher focused on the impact of peer support programs in addressing burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers, it was apparent that dispatchers are the first of the first responders. Although field officers are the first to arrive on scene of an emergency (Davis, 2005), the emergency begins with the dispatcher who answers the call for service. It is evident that jobs that require frontline customer service during crisis situations are emotionally intense (Guy et al., 2015). As dispatchers face times of grief or stress as a direct result of handling critical incident calls or dealing with loss, it would be beneficial for dispatchers to come together in helping one another. Dispatchers know and can relate to what another dispatcher may be feeling. The comfort they can bring to one another surpasses any type of well-being found anywhere else.

Levenson (2016) explained how in-house training for mental health and wellness in law enforcement is a must and peers should be support based. As the peer supporter understands the law enforcement culture, he or she can speak the language, and his or her personality attributes can be identified with and accepted by the law enforcement individual. Dispatchers are such a tremendous source of strength for one another that one would think that law enforcement personnel would want to organize a peer support team among dispatchers. The peer supporter is familiar with the job at hand and can relate to the individual who is having a challenging time coping. First responders are an insular group who believe that many on the outside cannot relate to what they have experienced; and therefore, they fear traumatizing others or worry about what others think of their lack of perceived strength in coping (Williams, 2017). Dispatchers tend to hold in what they deal with daily; there is not a need to tell another outside of the agency of a situation

because of the deficiency of understanding. Participants viewed peer support as especially valuable because of the opportunity for a non-treatment-based, normalizing relationship (Vayshenker et al., 2016). A peer supporter takes on a unique role and willingness to listen to his or her peers as well as to recognize aid and refer coworkers to resources his or her agency works with. Peer support is a broad and robust strategy for reaching groups that health services too often fail to engage (Sokol & Fisher, 2016). Dispatchers may not even realize they have an issue that is affecting them or those around them. Dispatchers are trained to help the public and the field units but lack the training in helping themselves. The culture is, “I can handle it. I’ve got this” (Williams, 2017, p. 10). Peer supporters are trained to recognize their own emotions as well as to be aware of those among whom they work. The researcher sought out emergency dispatchers to gain an understanding of their perception and opinion of an effective peer support program and to determine what impact, if any, it has on burnout among them.

The goal of Chapter 2 is to explore a connection between peer support programs and burnout among emergency dispatchers. The literature review begins the background and culture of law enforcement, specifically emergency dispatchers. Next, peer support and peer support programs are discussed. The literature provides the reader insight into the direct impact peer support and peer support programs may or may not have on an individual or the agency the individual works for. The researcher provides insight into why dispatchers continue to return to work after feeling isolated, underappreciated, working long shifts, and dealing with the stress of the calls. An explanation and understanding of burnout and the relationship it has among emergency dispatchers are provided. Emotional labor serves as the theoretical framework and foundation of this

dissertation. Therefore, the literature review will provide the reader with an understanding of emotional labor.

Culture of Emergency Dispatchers

Dispatchers are required to conduct themselves as professionals as they serve the public and the units in the field. The job of the dispatcher has various functions, which consist of a mixture of knowledge, skill, and verbal judo. Dispatchers are entrusted to operate several communication devices by transmitting over the air to the units in the field, providing information to surrounding agencies, operating and maneuvering around computer equipment, and receiving emergency and nonemergency telephone calls as well as having a clearance to view classified information. This mixture of emotional and technical skills makes the occupation of a dispatcher enter into the arena of emotional labor. The intensity and criticalness of emergency dispatch work captures a level of complexity not found in other service jobs (Guy et al., 2015). The emotional labor that the dispatcher faces throughout the day can become difficult to control. While working a public safety answering point (PSAP) position, the dispatcher is the first contact for the public. The dispatcher is unaware of what the incoming call holds for him or her. It could be a panicked parent needing help for his or her baby who is not breathing, a child crying who is witnessing his or her parents beating one another, a parent who just found his or her child who committed suicide, or someone who wants to commit suicide. It is the job of the dispatcher to put aside and suppress his or her feelings or emotions to get the information needed from the reporting party. It is vital to get information in a timely manner to assist the reporting party and not to impair the safety of the field unit. Many times, the reporting party is frantic, upset, agitated, or in shock, and it takes the dispatcher

to pry information from him or her. This information is pertinent to pass along to the field units, so they are aware of the situation and can prepare themselves for what they are about to handle. When dealing with an emergency caller, the level of emotional work rises dramatically and is an important element to minimizing further harm or saving a life (Guy et al., 2015). The dispatcher is tasked with asking a series of questions, both for the safety of the reporting party and the field units responding. An emergency dispatcher provides an example: “Sometimes dealing with people, one [911] call can drain you. I mean literally drain you, and I try not to let it stress me out, you know” (Guy et al., 2015, p. 105). The dispatcher is aware that it is his or her job as a public servant to govern the way he or she speaks to those he or she serves; it can be tiresome.

Decades of Dispatching

Senior Dispatcher P. Searle (personal communication, January 3, 2019) explained her 23 years of working as a 911 emergency dispatcher for a local agency:

I’ve had several jobs working for the county starting at the age of 21. I’ve worked at the welfare office, the county tax assessor’s office, the Superior Court, and the front office of one of our contract police departments. Every job presents its own set of challenges: adapting to the workplace culture, authority figures and coworker attitudes and personalities of all kinds, and just learning a new job is a challenge in and of itself. When I went to dispatch it was a little bit of a culture shock and also one of the hardest jobs I’ve ever had to learn.

Learning a new job is hard—but when I say that learning how to dispatch is the hardest job I’ve ever learned, it’s due to the nature of the job and also the very high stakes involved. Public safety and officer safety is paramount.

Learning that is one thing, experiencing it is quite another. Realizing that you are touching lives throughout your shift, in sometimes the worst moments of peoples' lives, has a weird effect on a person. Some dispatchers cannot deal effectively with that kind of stress. In my mind, this is the worst byproduct of the job; the stress and learning how to cope and manage effectively while still able to perform duties at an optimal level is something that dispatchers learn to live with whether they realize it or not. Some dispatchers thrive on that kind of stress and pressure especially the experienced and tenured dispatchers because they feel empowered by their knowledge and experience and are able to continually execute it successfully. It's a constant exchange of information between either a member of the public or a member of the department and the dispatcher. This is all done in an effort to render assistance of some kind and usually in a matter of seconds. There is a feeling of urgency and the need to be quick and efficient by using any method necessary. Everything is a mouse-click or keystroke away, quick, quick, quick, and even quicker if possible. That is how a dispatcher's mind is wired. We are trained to use our knowledge and the resources at hand to get our jobs done in the quickest way possible. I am one of those dispatchers who can find purpose in doing this job when I'm able to problem-solve and use critical thinking along with knowledge and experience to get the job done. I am one of those dispatchers who can find reward inward, intrinsically, by just doing the job I've been trained to do. I feel very fortunate to have this perspective because this is truly a "thankless" job. The nature of the job is such that there really is no time to sit back and get any closure or gratitude, etc. It would be nice and would

probably make a difference to some dispatchers in how they handle the stress of the job. But the reality is that it doesn't happen on a normal, regular basis and it's just something that we have to accept. The purpose of doing the job quickly and efficiently outweighs the need for accolades and recognition. I think this attitude has enabled me to survive this job for the past 23 years and I'm grateful for it. The attitude is what helps me survive the job, but there is a long list of reasons why I continue to stay at the job:

- The culture in a public safety dispatch center is similar to a type of "family" dynamic; there will be disagreements and arguments, but when the rubber hits the road, everyone comes together to meet a common goal and it's amazing to watch. It comes complete with another language and the ability to predict a coworker's next move or finish their sentence. It's a very satisfying feeling to be a part of this unique family dynamic.
- The atmosphere in a public safety dispatch center is never boring. There's always something to talk about, plan, organize, observe, and laugh about. We share in small victories, mourn great losses, relate to common everyday issues, and celebrate milestones together.
- The things we deal with and handle during a shift are sometimes things normal people don't ever talk about or even imagine. The ways in which we cope with those types of incidents vary—but within that coping mechanism that develops for each of us there remains one common denominator and that is the knowledge that we are all in it together. There is an unstated understanding that we are all aware that we've been impacted like no one outside of our little

world will ever understand. There is a lot of chaos within that little world of learning how to deal with stress and “psychological trauma.” As we attempt to navigate the waters of this stress and trauma as a result of the type of job we do, there is uncertainty, doubt, fear, and confusion. One thing that brings a little bit of comfort is knowing that the person right next to you has been there or felt that sense before. It needs no explanation because it is simply understood. Often, we are not very good at coping effectively and it’s only recently that our dispatch center has begun to focus on this kind of trauma and stress and its negative effects. That look of “knowing” from a coworker is comforting sometimes even when no words are spoken—the sense that we’re all “in the same boat” is helpful when dealing with certain stressors.

There are also a few things that I’ve noticed about myself over the years after working in this type of job. I hate talking on the phone. I hate it. I will only have long conversations if I’m able to multitask and do something else while I’m on the phone. I’m also a terrible cynic and I’m very jaded. I don’t ever take anything at face value. There’s always a backstory. Always. I’m very impatient when conversing with family members or people outside of my work family. I need answers and I need them quick and without all of the small talk that goes along with it. Get to the point! If I’m at home and trying to relax, it’s rare that I’m able to just watch TV or sit and read. I have to be doing a few things at once—then and only then will I feel accomplished or at least utilizing my time wisely. This causes a problem for me because I tend to start a lot of projects all at once, but neither will get finished. It’s an affliction; I’m used to not getting any

closure at work and it's almost like I'm in my comfort zone when I have many stokes in the fire but no real closure. (P. Searle, personal communication, January 3, 2019)

P. Searle (personal communication, January 3, 2019) described her journey of the past 23 years of dispatching, the stress of the job and the gratification she received being a part of a “family” dynamic. Searle explained how difficult the job was for her to learn as she emphasized the importance of public safety and officer safety and how paramount it is. She provided a realization of the benefits and what it is that keeps her working in such a thankless job. Searle explained how the job had affected her personal life, as she was aware of becoming cynical and jaded. However, she continued to be devoted to the job. Jobs that require frontline customer service during crisis situations are emotionally intense (Guy et al., 2015). Since the dispatcher is the first contact for the public, the dispatcher needs to be aware of his or her actions, tone, and mannerisms as he or she speaks to the public and the field units. The dispatcher may need to de-escalate the situation by his or her words.

Certification

As previously stated, the State of California Department of Justice requires dispatchers to be certified with 120 hours in training and 14 learning domains. Once the dispatcher accomplishes the 120 hours of the training course, he or she is awarded the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Professional Public Safety Dispatch–Basic Course certificate. Of the 120 hours of POST training, dispatchers receive 4 hours on wellness management. In this 4-hour block, resources on maintaining mental and physical wellness and self-care are provided. Dispatchers are provided

direction as to where to search for assistance if needed. The instruction that is provided in the 4-hour block is limited and generic because each agency has different resources. Agencies provide a separate training that is specific in following their own department's employee policy and procedures handbook. It is also not unusual to learn that new employees are trained in the technical skills of the job but not in the emotional work skills (Guy et al., 2015). A focus group discussion among dispatchers yielded the following: "You learn over time how to handle the feelings and new employees don't have that. They don't have that level of experience, so they haven't had a lot of exposure, so they haven't been able to teach themselves" (Guy et al., p. 70).

Dispatchers have a job that needs to get done, which may mean that they need to set aside their emotions until the job is done. Dispatchers suppressing or putting their feelings on hold is not uncommon. When the stress is too much and the very toughness that facilitates functioning on the job is compromised, many of these first responders are reluctant to seek help (Miller, 2014). Many times, after working an 8-, 10-, 12-, and sometimes 14-hour shift, the dispatcher is exhausted and does not want to recount the day. Workers suppress their own emotions while expressing another emotion for the purpose of the interaction (Guy et al., 2015). Suppressing their feelings about the incident is one way to hide from reality. Many generations of first responders are conditioned that it is a sign of weakness to admit and talk about feelings in the aftermath of a bad call or tragic event (Williams, 2017). Changing the mindset of the first responders will take time. The researcher's professional experience made her aware that dispatchers tend to be independent, detail oriented, and assertive. Yet, some may say that dispatchers appear to be somewhat reclusive because they do not want to be on the phone

on their days off, they may avoid meeting new people unless introduced by someone they already know, and they shy away from talking about what they do for a living. Difficulty with trust appears to be an occupational hazard for workers in law enforcement and public safety who typically maintain a strong sense of self-sufficiency and insistence on solving their own problems (Miller, 2014).

Coping With a Stressful Job

Dispatchers as well as many first responders have ways of coping to get by in the job that can be so stressful. One coping mechanism would be to gird oneself against his or her own emotional response by protecting him or herself from what he or she hears and what he or she is feeling by putting on an emotional armor. One dispatcher described it: “It’s just when I come in here, I’m-it’s like you put on a coat of armor, you know, you just, you have to be kind of tough” (Guy et al., 2015, p. 35). The dispatcher may be arming him or herself not only from the public but also from the dispatchers with whom he or she works. Call takers express irritation when callers do not answer their questions (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). This produces an annoyance for the dispatcher who at times can be perceived as distressed or irritable, creating a sense of tension. Many times, dispatchers have been known to show themselves as strong and stoic, even sarcastic in demeanor similar to sworn police officers (Williams, 2017). Sarcasm, joking, or ventilating feelings through humor or depersonalization is known to be used as a coping mechanism for many in law enforcement. One dispatcher described her strategy of coping:

It’s just, you know, kind of philosophy. Once you put the phone down . . . you might laugh at it . . . I’ll say, hey, I just had this guy—just a little venting type

thing—I had this guy who said this guy beat him up and ha ha ha we laugh about it and go on to the next call, so it's kinda like you're just venting with your next-door neighbor or something like that about the situation. (Guy et al., 2015, p. 36)

Without understanding the job of law enforcement or the culture of the dispatch center, the dispatcher's humor may be perceived as appalling. The humor and joking appear to be one of the most common ways a dispatcher manages and appraises emotion (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). Williams (2017) mentioned how humor appears to play a positive role in providing distance from the incident and in dealing with uncomfortable emotions. She added that humor creates social bonds that contribute to a feeling of group cohesiveness and safety, which helps in the mitigation of emotional reactions experienced as a result of the traumatic event (Williams, 2017).

Along with humor, dispatchers are known to make fun of or blame the reporting parties for the predicament they are reporting. Call takers seem to regard many callers as stupid, careless, and at fault for their own situations (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). One way dispatchers manage their emotions is by verbally assessing a reporting party and how he or she is conducting his or her life. The dispatcher may blame the reporting party for his or her own misfortune. A less appalling coping mechanism would be for the dispatcher to place him or herself in a time-out, unplug from the console, take a walk, be alone, or go sit in his or her vehicle for a few minutes. Unfortunately, many times the dispatcher does not recognize when he or she needs a time-out. The job of the dispatcher is to help the public and the field units; therefore, he or she needs to set aside his or her own emotions.

The final coping mechanism is storytelling. Storytelling consists of the dispatcher sharing his or her experience either from the calls he or she has taken or the incidents he or she handles while being on the radio with the field units. Through the reflections they share and stories they tell, call takers make sense of emotionally disturbing parts of their job (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). This may be done by joking or sarcasm; either way it can be a way for the dispatcher to relieve him or herself from the stress of the incident.

Although the job is emotionally laboring, in return, the dispatcher receives compassion satisfaction from his or her actions of helping (Rigden, 2009). As much as the job of the emergency dispatcher is emotionally laboring, there is much to be grateful for. In the departing words of a former dispatcher who worked his way up the ranks retiring as the information technology manager, Alex Harris (personal communication, March 21, 2018) stated,

As much as the law, court decisions, and politics may change the complexity of law enforcement in general, the friendships and relationships remain the same. We are a unique group of people who have chosen this career path and we experience things that most of the population will never experience or could ever imagine. It is this uniqueness that makes this bond among us so different. Unlike most professions, we literally depend on each other for our daily survival. We are a true brotherhood.

Harris retired after 30-plus years of service. He had worked as a dispatcher and alongside of many dispatchers throughout his career. He witnessed the change within society and could relate to the intricate job of the dispatcher and law enforcement. It appears the bond of friendship and relationships that Harris found among his coworkers was well

worth the complexity of the job. Dispatchers come together when it matters, and they form a connection that not many outside of law enforcement can understand. The following provides the reader additional insight into the culture of emergency dispatch:

Kim Rigden

Rigden (2009), in “Stress and the 911 Dispatcher,” presented a grim picture of dispatch culture in this help wanted ad:

911 Dispatcher, Applicants must be easily irritated by 911 callers; phone slamming and swearing an asset. Preference will be given to candidates able to complain about their workload while receiving calls. Must be able to survive on donuts for breakfast, greasy takeout food in the wee hours and gallons of coffee. Punctuality and good attendance are not required, but working overtime is essential. The successful candidate should expect to be bullied by annoying senior co-workers. Remuneration: not nearly enough to put up with all this. (p. 1)

As one reads the ad, it would be nearly impossible to get candidates to apply. A 911 emergency dispatcher is one who, during his or her career, can make a difference in society. Individuals are attracted to the thought of being the one who can make a difference. Does that attraction fade within the dispatcher, the public servant, the individual who originally began his or her career in setting out to want to help others and make a difference? How does one’s attitude change and become that individual in the help wanted ad? The article faults stress as being the culprit in defining dispatch culture. It mentions stress as being an epidemic within 911 centers, not the everyday stress of life but the emotional labor the job of the dispatcher endures. The cumulative stress that the dispatcher experiences from call to call and incident to incident begins to wear on the

dispatcher. Over time and without proper care, the dispatcher may form physical and mental ailments (Rigden, 2009). For that very reason, it is significant for dispatchers to receive proper care either from a professional or by reaching out to a peer who can relate and understand.

Rigden (2009) provided an explanation of what stress is, discussed the different types of stress, and clarified how that individuals deal with stress daily but in different ways. However, by identifying, recognizing, and dealing with the signs of stress, an individual can begin to reduce those stressors in his or her life. The first definition of stress is general stress, which is the normal stress of daily life. Daily stress is both physical and/or mental stimulation within a person's life. Individuals learn how to make choices. They grow as individuals, change behaviors, and deal with the pressures it takes to get through life. Controlling normal stress is good. Compassion stress is another stress and most related to why dispatchers do what they do. It is a natural behavior and an emotional response for the dispatcher to feel empathy toward others. Many times, it is compassion satisfaction that the 911 emergency dispatcher receives that keeps him or her in the dispatching career. Cumulative stress is the buildup of stressors over time. Unfortunately, it is hard for individuals to recognize when they have reached their accumulation of enough stressors. This is a time when others around them may need to advise their coworker of concerns they have noticed (Rigden, 2009).

The final stress discussed by Rigden (2009), critical incident stress (CIS), was introduced by Jeff Mitchell. CIS is a situation in which an individual experiences an unusual emotional reaction that has the potential to interfere with his or her ability to either function at the scene or at another time. Emergency service personnel, which

include dispatchers, do not realize that CIS is a normal response to an abnormal event. What dispatchers hear over the phone, very few in society will ever hear in their life. The secondary trauma that dispatchers experience while answering 911 emergency calls can be detrimental to the dispatcher's mental and physical stability. The dispatcher does not know what type of call he or she will receive; therefore, it can range from a nonemergency type call with a very calm reporting party to a call that raises the dispatcher's stress level dangerously high due to the demand. Recognizing the differences is not always identifiable to the dispatcher as he or she trains to proceed to the next call (Rigden, 2009).

Rigden (2009) concluded her article in two ways. The first is by providing several ways how stress can manifest within an individual if unresolved or untreated. The article provides a proactive approach to remaining physically and mentally healthy. It is important for dispatchers to take care of themselves in order to be able to care for others the way a public servant should.

Troxell (2008), in *Indirect Exposure to the Trauma of Others: The Experiences of 9-1-1 Telecommunicators*, directed her study to the experiences of 911 emergency dispatchers resulting from indirect exposure to trauma by using a descriptive, cross-sectional approach and generated both quantitative and qualitative data. A pilot testing phase was conducted with 16 call takers and dispatchers employed for at least 1 year who completed the survey and an interview. After recommendations were provided by the 16 participants, the main study was conducted among a convenience sample of 984 full- and part-time dispatchers and 79 emergency communication centers within the state of Illinois. There were 497 responses after a second wave of mailings. An emotional labor

questionnaire along with a questionnaire specific to job duties was sent to the study participants. This study was built on the work of S. R. Jenkins (1997) who examined the stress that dispatchers experience due to their helping roles. The study examined trauma exposure, emotional labor, risk of burnout, potential for compassion satisfaction, and risk for secondary traumatic stress. Troxell indicated, “The U.S. Department of Labor defines police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers as individuals who “handle calls from people reporting crimes, fires, and medical emergencies” (p. 16). The emergency dispatcher’s exposure is in hearing the distress of others. The environment that the dispatchers work in is described as noisy, distracting, and rapidly paced, all while people are walking around, dispatchers are taking calls, and conversations are taking place in a near proximity (Troxell, 2008). Although the conditions are disruptive, the dispatchers are liable for their performance in handling the incident they receive.

Telecommunicators undergo the closest scrutiny with all calls being taped and subject to internal review (Troxell, 2008). Troxell (2008) stated, “The job of a public safety dispatcher is particularly stressful because a slow or an improper response to a call can result in serious injury or further harm” (p. 16). At times, dispatchers are expected to perform several activities simultaneously, having little control because of the workload and nature of the incident. Dispatchers are expected to make appropriate decisions, in a timely manner, based on their training, experience, judgment, department policy and procedures, and instincts all the while knowing that their decisions may undergo scrutiny, as all calls are taped and subjected to internal review. Dispatchers need to remain calm and professional even during times when the reporting party is hysterical, distraught, and impaired by mental defects or substance abuse and using obscene language directed at

them. Dispatchers are unable to leave their work station unless relieved by another dispatcher for scheduled breaks or end of shift. The work environment can become hectic at any point during a shift. Research shows that dispatchers use facial and other nonverbal expressions, joke about the incident or the caller, and engage in sharing experiences with one another. As frustrating as some dispatchers become with the callers, they also express the adrenaline rush they receive from the intense calls. Dispatchers often find themselves going beyond their job description to locate information for the field units. Giving of themselves reinforces the importance of their role in protecting the public's safety and their skill in doing their job, thereby improving job satisfaction. Troxell (2008) concluded her study by expressing that dispatchers are not viewed as first responders by many because of not being on the scene physically. However, they are the first of the first responders as they are the original contact to the public.

Michelle Perin

Perin (2016), "The Power of 911 Peer Support," mentioned that dispatchers many times refuse to appear weak in front of their peers or even to themselves. They tend to fight against acknowledging the truth of the load they handle while working. The dispatcher is known to ignore, stuff away, laugh it off, or become defiant, denying anything is wrong. In order to change the culture, Perin stated that "a revision to a healthier emotional code" (para. 5) would allow dispatchers to accept support, feel emotions, grieve when needed, and support one another. Dispatchers are known to carry on after a critical incident. They are trained to help others and frequently forget or do not realize that they need help from time to time as well. Until the culture or change in

creating a healthier emotional code among dispatchers is reached, there will be dispatchers facing depression, anxiety, anger, negativity, and eventually burnout. Perin focused and encouraged peer support as one way of assisting dispatchers in need. As peers can understand and relate to one another, they can support each other during difficult times.

K. Adams, J. Shakespeare-Finch, and D. Armstrong

Adams et al. (2014), in “An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Stress and Well-Being in Emergency Medical Dispatchers,” discussed the stress and well-being of emergency medical dispatchers (EMDs) who provide telehealth support to their field units. Although most dispatch centers do not have the capabilities of visual aids, there are similarities. One such similarity would be vicarious trauma through acute and cumulative exposure to traumatic incidents and their perceived lack of control, which can expound feelings of helplessness (Adams et al., 2014).

During Adams et al.’s (2014) research, three superordinate themes emerged from the data: (a) operational stress and vicarious trauma, (b) organizational stress, and (c) posttraumatic growth. The superordinate themes yielded 14 component themes derived from clustering subthemes. Each theme provided a form and insight into describing the culture of dispatch. The first theme, operational stress and vicarious trauma, yielded six components that emerged from the theme. Although most of the components in the first theme were directed toward the stress of the job, they led to reasons why the dispatch culture is the way it is. A component theme is spillover. It talks about the pressure and trauma exposure that is carried over from the stress of an

incident. Stress that is carried over causes negative morale issues to occur within the dispatch center (Adams et al., 2014).

The second theme, organizational stress, yielded three components that focused more toward the department itself (Adams et al., 2014). The first component, lack of recognition, was expressed by EMDs who felt they lacked value within the organization. They believed that they rarely received positive feedback from administration. The only recognition they thought they ever received was when they did something against policy and procedures. There was a perception of exclusion from debriefings, training, rewards, and ceremonies that those in the field received. When they were invited to a debriefing, they felt valued and important within the emergency organization. The second component, politics, is a perceived feeling of division between the EMDs and field units. The EMDs had reported in the past that they felt unappreciated and somewhat segregated by management and the field units. However, EMDs in one of the stations who were interviewed provided a slight change in this perception. Their perception of the culture had a positive change. They felt that the field units they worked with had a better understanding of the EMD's job. The EMDs felt they had a rapport with the field units and could ask them questions about the incident, providing them closure. The third component, culture of covering up, was described as having an atmosphere of "big brother" environment. Because phone and radio transmissions are taped and recorded, any errors are subject to disciplinary consequences and potential litigation. The EMDs did not reach out for help when it came to job-related uncertainties, needs for assistance, and stress. The perceived organizational culture formed barriers to help-seeking behaviors. One EMD mentioned, "They think that it shows they're weak and that they're

not handling the job.” Another perception was the feeling of needing to “get over it,” which was perceived from senior management (Adams et al., 2014).

The third theme was posttraumatic growth. The components within this theme focused on cognitive strategies, self-care, and the individual. Dispatchers expressed how being exposed to other people’s critical incidents and traumatic events caused them to begin thinking about their own mortality and the beliefs they had about society. Learning how to cope in the job dispatchers do, by appreciating and valuing their own lives, is something that can assist them in surviving as a dispatcher. Self-care, support, humor, and acceptance were components mentioned. Many of the dispatchers voiced their ability to construct new narratives that inspired their behaviors and enhanced their well-being through self-care strategies to counteract the stresses of the job. Some dispatchers reached out to peers for support or utilized humor to mask the intensity of the incident and what they just heard over the phone or radio. A distraction technique is used by the dispatchers to cope with their job. The last component was acceptance, being able to self-reflect on the job they do and accept that they did all they could to assist the reporting party or the field unit. Holding onto guilt from thinking he or she could have changed an outcome would be detrimental to the dispatcher. The research concluded that although dispatchers felt their own sense of self-worth for their work, they were negatively affected through perceptions of inadequate positive feedback and the absence of team cohesiveness between the dispatchers and the field units. The dispatchers felt that the debriefings, which occur when the field units and the dispatchers involved in a critical incident come together to talk about the incident, assisted them in processing the psychological trauma associated with the crisis that they handled (Adams et al., 2014).

During a debriefing conducted by Williams (2017), she witnessed dispatchers become emotional during the critical incident debrief as they expressed feelings of helplessness when they could not see what was going on did not know the status of the officer or victim. The debrief aided the dispatchers in feeling validated and acknowledged as an important component of the incident. As dispatchers and field units learn from one another, the culture of law enforcement will shift in the hopes of creating one team.

A. L. Franklin and J. F. Pagan

Franklin and Pagan (2006), in “Organization Culture as an Explanation for Employee Discipline Practices,” mentioned that culture inside an organization defines the boundaries of acceptable action. If this is correct, and culture defines the boundaries of acceptable action, are the actions within dispatch centers appropriate? Culture is a system of shared values and beliefs built by employees within an agency. Within a public organization, values and beliefs need to follow policy and procedures; otherwise, they will become subjective. Franklin and Pagan presented two sets of issues: the tangible factors and the intangible factors. The tangible factors are based upon the policy and procedures that an agency wants an employee to follow. Most agencies require their employees to sign a form stating that they have read and comprehend the policy and procedures that were presented and at times changed. This allows for the department to remain in compliance. However, supervision plays a huge role because the supervisors need to enforce the policy and procedures. Franklin and Pagan explained that, many times, this is not the case among supervisors. These authors found inconsistencies in the way supervisors disciplined or lacked to discipline. This allowed for the culture of the

center to form. The intangible factors are more relationship based. It appears that the intangible factor was extremely biased. Supervisors would decide to make decisions dependent upon their feelings, which would create decisions to be influenced by feelings and therefore those decisions were, once again, subjective. This creates favoritism, nepotism, and inequality among employees and creates a culture of inconsistencies. The culture of a department begins with the administration, which runs the department. Administration needs to provide guidance, support, and supply the supervisors with the tools needed to do their job effectively (Franklin & Pagan, 2006).

J. Marshall and T. Laorenza

Marshall and Laorenza (2018) edited the book, *The Resilient 9-1-1 Professional*, which provided several stories and sections to give the reader insight into the job and culture of the emergency dispatcher. Emergency dispatchers who read the book can identify with several aspects of Marshall and Laorenza's stories and realize that the job they do is important. Each chapter provides recommendations in healing and directs the reader to utilize self-care and peer support and learn how to become resilient. One section that stood out in addressing the culture of dispatch was in Chapter 3, "Understanding Stress and the Nine Unique 9-1-1 Risk Factors Faced by Every Dispatcher." The nine risk factors were given after a story that delivers an understanding about stress. Marshall and Laorenza mentioned that humans can handle an enormous amount of physical and psychological demands, many times making individuals stronger after dealing with the demand.

As cited in Chapter 3, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines job stress as "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur

when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (Sauter, as cited in Marshall & Laorenza, 2018, p. 25). It is essential that the emergency dispatchers gain an understanding and take it upon themselves to utilize the resources in becoming resilient. Departments need to provide those resources for their dispatchers to utilize. Marshall and Laorenza’s (2018) nine risk factors are as follow:

1. “No warning before potentially traumatic calls” (p. 29).
2. “The big ‘C’ of 9-1-1—lack of closure” (p. 29).
3. “Telecommunicators are psychologically on scene but physically unable to reach it” (p. 31).
4. “9-1-1 professionals ‘send their own’ into harm’s way” (p. 28).
5. “Limited sensory engagement with those on scene” (p. 33).
6. “High call volume and frequency” (p. 35).
7. “The crazy-tasking demand” (p. 28).
8. “Little to no downtime to de-stress” (p. 28).
9. “Lack of appreciation and professional respect” (p. 28).

Dispatchers are the first of the first responders. Risk Factor 1 says that there is no warning as to what type of incident will be reported to the emergency dispatcher.

According to Marshall and Laorenza (2018),

The sounds of the human suffering that explode into their headsets come in hot and unfiltered: The responder in a panic shouting, “officer down”; the mother screaming that her baby isn’t breathing; the father whose speech is indecipherable between groans after discovering his son’s suicide. (p. 29)

The dispatcher handles each call without warning of the devastation that is about to be reported. Dispatchers are trained to control their emotions by getting what is needed from the reporting party for the emergency field unit for them to do their job and move on to the next call.

Risk Factor 2 places the dispatcher into a world of creating his or her own scenario because of the lack of closure. Marshall and Laorenza (2018) stated that as they collected research through the country, they asked what the most stressful part of the dispatcher's job was. The response they received was the lack of closure after dispatching units to high-risk scenes or after calls with individuals for whom they felt the most empathy, usually children and the elderly.

Risk Factor 3 places the emergency dispatcher as the first of the first responders who answer the call from the public. As the emergency dispatcher retrieves the needed information via telephone for the emergency field unit, he or she can at times feel helpless in not being able to physically help in the field. Telecommunicators must be equipped with the ability to tolerate such extraordinary stress and optimize their resilience.

Risk Factor 4 describes the dispatcher's job to assist the public in getting them help by sending an emergency field unit to them. Therefore, the dispatcher is sending their emergency field unit, coworker, friend, or possibly spouse into harm's way. This can result in a form of survival guilt for the dispatcher. One of the worst fears for an emergency dispatcher is for an emergency field unit to get hurt while on the dispatcher's watch. Marshall and Laorenza (2018) questioned over 1,000 emergency dispatchers about what matters most in the heart of every dispatcher, and almost in unison, they said

“everyone goes home” (p. 32). The dispatcher feels the responsibility to make sure that emergency field units are safe at the end of their watch.

Risk Factor 5 limits sensory engagement with those on the scene. Utilizing our five senses is something we as humans do daily. When a person lacks the use of a sense because of unforeseen reasons, he or she learns how to cope and deal with that unfortunate loss. However, when that person is restricted from the lack of a sense, knowing it is temporary or knowing he or she can still use that sense he or she has a hard time accepting that loss. Dispatchers cannot literally see the scene, so they use their imagination to connect with the people and events on scene through their visual channel, not just their auditory channel. Unfortunately, dispatchers find themselves imagining the worst. This helps the dispatcher remain prepared. The downside is that the dispatcher who finds him or herself struggling with the incident will struggle not only with the audio version but also with the image he or she created within his or her mind.

Risk Factor 6 is the high call volume and the frequency of the calls coming into the center to be answered. The frequency of the calls is a significant stressor due to the sheer number of informational bits that the emergency dispatcher’s brain must process related to each call. The emergency dispatcher is unaware of what type of call he or she will receive.

Dispatch culture is defined in a variety of ways, and it is subjective dependent upon who is asked, although many of the characteristics are found to be similar. Dispatch centers across the nation are in agreement. The job of the emergency dispatcher is not the normal Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. job. Dispatchers are expected to work 24/7, 7 days a week, 356 days a year, graveyard, swing shifts, holidays, and

weekends. Dispatchers are tasked with conveying information received from callers to officers in the field in a clear, timely, and efficient manner. Many times, this is done while the caller is hysterical, uncooperative, screaming profanities at the dispatcher, and crying. The job of the dispatcher is complex, and the multitasking he or she is expected to do is undefined. The dispatcher may need to handle one critical incident after another for several hours. He or she must be able to handle his or her emotions, as well as the emotions of another, all while a critical incident is occurring. A high level of stress can overload and break down a person's physical and mental system (Weibel et al., 2003). Generally, the public does not give much thought to the 911 system's working until the media catches the system making a mistake (Nordberg, 1995). It is commonly known to dispatchers that they are the voice that is heard, yet never seen, and that they are forgotten often, even by the field units they keep safe. However, dispatchers come to work to do the job of helping the public as well as helping the field units. The public servant within the dispatcher keeps him or her returning to a job that for many has caused frustration and stress but also gives him or her a sense of pride. The culture of the dispatch center is unique; it is not the typical clerical job. It is somewhat undefined and only understood by those who have experienced it.

Peer Support

Peer support provides the dispatchers a safe place to talk and express his or her feelings without being judged or critiqued by someone who does not understand the job. Building a peer support program would help in reducing emotional labor among dispatchers in hopes of reducing the stresses of the job and alleviating burnout. Crane, Lepicki, and Knudsen (2016) conducted a study on the context of peer support and stated

that helping others as a peer support specialist has been found to lead to numerous benefits, including improved self-esteem, physical health, empowerment, coping skills, mental health, self-concepts, recovery, and hope. A peer supporter has an understanding and has lived the experiences of a specific job. During a peer support conference, the topic of what it means to be a peer supporter for first responders was addressed.

Battalion Chief Steve Diaz (personal communication, November 25, 2017) expressed his role and what it meant to him to be a peer supporter:

Providing peer support is an essential part of my life. Over the years, my personal life and professional life, I have been surrounded with countless people that guided me through life's challenges. This was not advice or scoldings but true peer support. A person that allowed me to be myself and allowed me to make mistakes. I'd describe it as *unconditional understanding*.

Diaz has been a part of Cal Fire peer support team since 2001 and most currently is assigned as the southern regional program coordinator for Cal Fire's employee support service since January 2012. A peer supporter who is able to guide rather than direct a peer during life's challenges, work related or not, is all it takes (S. Diaz, personal communication, November 25, 2017). Assisting a peer during a difficult time allows for the peer to not feel alone. During times of fatigue and stressful shifts, it would be beneficial for a dispatcher to be able to reach out to a peer who knows and understands what the dispatcher may be feeling.

Occupational stress can contribute to a variety of unwanted problems, including negative attitudes toward a profession, burnout, somatic and psychosomatic issues, and even psychological disorders such as depression and

posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Martinussen, Richardsen, & Burke, 2007). Reaching out may be comforting to both the peer in need and the peer supporter. The dispatcher can rely on a peer supporter who may also have had the same or similar difficulties, work related or not, at one time. Peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on the key principle of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001).

As public servants, emergency dispatchers are required to provide the upmost quality assistance to those they serve while controlling their feelings as they do their job as best they can. The public does not call during times of enjoyment or pleasure, they call when an unfortunate mishap has occurred. Therefore, many times the dispatcher becomes the recipient of the caller's anger. When the citizen who calls is upset, distraught, argumentative, and uncooperative, it is the dispatcher's job to remain composed and proceed in extracting information from the citizen. The dispatcher becomes the field unit's line of communication. He or she provides information that can direct and support the unit in helping the citizens while remaining safe him or herself. The emotional rollercoaster that the dispatcher goes through is constant during his or her workday. Being able to speak about the incidents can be one way to help lessen some of the emotions the dispatcher may be feeling. Peer support provides an outlet for the frustrations and anguish that arise from emotional work (Guy et al., 2015).

Levels of Peer Support

Marshall and Laorenza (2018) dedicated a chapter in the book, *The Resilient 9-1-1 Professional*, to peer support, which provides two levels of peer support that can be designed for the dispatch center. The first level of support is an “informal” program. In an informal peer support program, all those involved are volunteers who provide support to one another by active listening. The peer supporters have the basic skills needed to help a coworker who just needs to talk about an incident. The informal program allows the volunteers to make themselves available for the peer in need to reach out to them when needed. This is done in the hope of improving morale and attitude among the dispatchers.

The second level of support is an “official” program. The official program is one of a stronger foundation with direction that provides a course for the peer volunteers. Stressing the importance in confidentiality because of the engaging conversations that the peer supporter may have with a peer is essential. Without confidentiality, the program will not be successful, although there should never be a time that a clinical burden should be placed on a peer supporter because he or she is a nonclinical person. The peer supporters in the official program are trained in active listening, active engagement—help problem solve, and active rescuing—bridging to emergency care to prevent suicide. Another component that is highly important for the peer support volunteer is being aware of his or her own emotional status. The peer supporters are also taught to recognize when they need to reach out for their own self-care. One of the greatest risks in a volunteer’s role as a peer supporter is burnout. Once again, the peer support volunteer is willing to

help and care for his or her coworker; however, if he or she lacks in caring for themselves, this may create a different issue.

The chapter provides a criteria for certified peer support professionals as well as the training they can seek through the 911 Training Institute. The outline begins by providing qualifications for peer support candidates. One example is to have a solid reputation within the communication center as being a trustworthy and mature individual who has shown the ability to provide confidentiality and does not contribute in gossip (Marshall & Laorenza, 2018). Another section explains the importance of developing curriculum on training the peer support volunteer. Following are a couple of topics: defining the core of peer support, terms and confidentiality between dispatchers and their peer supporter, and defining and practicing effective listening (Marshall & Laorenza, 2018). The last section of the outline stresses the importance of continuous education for the peer support volunteer. Providing knowledge to the peer support volunteers in different scenarios can prepare them in a circumstance they may not have thought about. Leaders of emergency telecommunication centers in and beyond the United States are making an effort to find the means by which they can support and equip their personnel to withstand the extraordinary demands of their work (Marshall & Laorenza, 2018).

Processes of Peer Support

Gidugu et al. (2015), in an article titled “Individual Peer Support: A Qualitative Study of Mechanisms of its Effectiveness,” shed light on the processes of peer support, by conducting the study with individuals who had received

substantial individual peer support. An interview guide was developed by examining previous literature on peer support and likely mechanisms of its effectiveness. The guide covered several areas: the nature of peer relationships, expectations held by the recipient for peer support, the nature of the support provided as perceived by the recipients, and perceptions of effectiveness of that support. Tangible methods were provided such as the peer supporter accompanying or assisting the coworker with errands and appointments including driving the coworker to places. Peer supporters provided help with shopping, laundry, paperwork, and daily living (Gidugu et al., 2015). Some of the more intangible yet vitally important aspects of the peer support relationship were the core conditions (Rogers, 1956) of respect, warmth, empathy, and genuineness that underlie all helping relationships (Ruscinova, Rogers, Cook, Ellison, & Lyass, 2013). Peer supporters need to be properly trained to be able to know and understand the role they are taking on because this will help them in providing their coworkers with adequate support. Boundaries need to be kept; the peer supporter needs to understand and know when to direct the coworker to resources that can assist them if additional professional help is needed. The overall qualitative study appeared to be a success (Gidugu et al., 2015). Several participants described how the knowledge of shared experience enhanced comfort with the peer specialist to share more openly and develop a personal connection. Practical support, role modeling and mentoring, and social opportunities along with getting emotional support through a normalizing relationship with someone

who has similar experiences stand out as the most critical and effective aspects of the peer support specialist's roles and duties (Gidugu et al., 2015).

Peer Support for the Hardly Reached

Sokol and Fisher (2016), in their article, "*Peer Support for the Hardly Reached: A Systematic Review*," that referred to peer support as an emotional, social, and practical assistance provided by nonprofessionals. The objective of the study was to conduct a systematic review assessing the reach and effectiveness of peer support among hardly reached individuals as well as peer support strategies used. The hardly reached individuals fall into three domains: individual (e.g., psychological-cognitive factors, occupation, sexual orientation, transiency, substance use, history of incarceration, and disability); demographic (e.g., age, gender, and socioeconomic status); and cultural-environmental (e.g., social network, ethnicity, geography, and discrimination; Sokol & Fisher, 2016). Dispatchers who fall into each domain can be classified as the hardly reached. The identified fundamental strategies that the authors present can be used when engaging with an emergency dispatcher. The authors defined the terms *peer support* and *hardly reached* (Sokol & Fisher, 2016). They referred to peer support as emotional, social, and practical assistance provided by nonprofessionals to help people sustain health behaviors. The term hardly reached is preferred over hard to reach because the latter proposes that fundamental qualities of the group and its members, rather than the interventions trying to reach them, are responsible for members not being reached by health service. The qualitative study that focused on the hardly reached group identified trust and respect, flexibility, community partnerships, and user involvement and empowerment as the fundamental strategies in engaging these individuals. Providing

individuals a necessary base or core allows them to feel secure yet vulnerable in accepting assistance. The discussion stated that the majority of the studies conducted, 93.6%, reported significant improvements in health outcomes attributable to peer support (Sokol & Fisher, 2016). As in many studies, the authors ran into a couple of limitations. It was evident that previous reviews of peer support have often been narrow in scope and not focused on groups that are hardly reached. Therefore, the lack of or limited publications that were reviewed were biased. The second limitation was that the study was unable to use meta-analytic techniques, due to the variety of outcome measures employed in the review studies. They could evaluate the effectiveness according to significant between-group or within-group differences. It was determined that peer support was a broad and robust means of improving health outcomes among groups too often hardly reached through conventional approaches. Trust and respect were significantly associated with retention of participants. The overall results concluded that peer support was effective among those hardly reached (Sokol & Fisher, 2016).

Eagle, Creel, and Alexandrov (2012) conducted a pilot study, “The Effect of Facilitated Peer Support Sessions on Burnout and Grief Management Among Health Care Providers in Pediatric Intensive Care Units,” that was geared toward the health professionals who care for children admitted to Pediatric Intensive Care Units (PICUs) who face life-limiting conditions. An evaluation was conducted on grief and burnout among the health-care professionals who worked in the PICU. The researchers explored the facilitated support sessions that were conducted as a method of reducing grief perceptions and burnout among providers (Eagle et al., 2012). A pretest and posttest, interactive facilitated peer support session was provided. The study consisted of 50

interdisciplinary professionals who were invited to participate. These participants were the professionals who worked day and night with children who had life-threatening illnesses. In 2009, 18 of the children died because of their illnesses, with an approximate hospital stay of 34.7 days (Eagle et al., 2012). The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) and Hogan Grief Reaction Checklist (HGRC) were administered before and after the pretest and posttest sessions (Eagle et al., 2012).

The pilot study was designed to evaluate the levels of grief, stress, and burnout within the PICU team as well as the effectiveness of facilitated peer support for grief exploration and management of burnout at the facility (Eagle et al., 2012).

Unfortunately, the results of the study did not show significant changes relating to grief and burnout. The study did report that the implementation of peer support groups for health-care providers led to a significant improvement in general health scores and perceived work demands, participation, and support. There were a few limitations that were mentioned. The first was the small sample size of participants (Eagle et al., 2012). Although the small group size may maximize group interaction and discussion, the small sample size can be a significant limitation. The second limitation was found in having two sessions that were offered in close succession (Eagle et al., 2012). Some participants were unable to make the second session even though the researchers offered each session more than one time. Another limitation was due to the posttest being administered directly following completion of Session 2 (Eagle et al., 2012). Participants may not have had enough time to absorb the information, integrate the material, or be able to reflect on the new skills and concepts that were provided. The final limitation was concluded with the pretest results of the CBI and HGRC, which showed that participants

were not actively experiencing high levels of grief or burnout (Eagle et al., 2012).

Overall, participants reported that the sessions were helpful and that participation caused them to consider their experiences in a different manner. Changing the mindset of employees in what they see, hear, and deal with at work can help alleviate the emotional labor of their job.

Peer Characteristics

The University of South Florida provided a study written by Clark, Barrett, Frei, and Christy (2016), “What Makes a Peer a Peer?” The purpose of the study was to explore and learn more about certain peer characteristics that are considered important by consumers to feel a person is their peer. The study was based upon 41 participants in a jail diversion program for veterans who were asked to rate the peer characteristics in terms of importance for acting in a peer support role. A face-to-face interview was conducted within a 2-week time period. The participants were asked to rate the importance of 13 characteristics of peer service providers. A 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not important*) to 4 (*strongly important*) was used. Participants were also able to provide their own feedback as they were asked an open-ended question on certain characteristics that they felt were important. Although this study was not law-enforcement based, the intentions of gaining an understanding in what characteristics are needed in a peer supporter is still beneficial. Because all participants were veterans and the program was clearly identified as veteran centered, it was not surprising that the number one characteristic that the participants rated as *most important* was “having served in the U.S. Armed Forces” (Clark et al., 2016, p. 75). Programs involving peers helping peers agree that shared life experiences are crucial to the endeavor. Although

there is no consensus on which life experiences are necessary for the support person to be effective, having a shared understanding of one's either present or past life creates a bond with one another. This bond can only be found between individuals who have worked, served, and understand the same trade and field work as the other. The philosophy behind the peer support program is one of acknowledging the voices of the recipients of service. The researchers concluded that the study was limited both by sample size and by demographics (Clark et al., 2016). However, the study has been an important first step in better understanding which characteristics are valued by consumers.

Role of Peer Specialists

Silver and Nemec (2016) wrote an article, "The Role of the Peer Specialists: Unanswered Questions," which raised inquiries on what the roles consist of as a peer specialist within health-care services. Although some of the information within the article is irrelevant to law enforcement, the concept of defining the role of a peer supporter can be useful. The information that can be best used from this article would be sections regarding defining *peeriness*, the varied peer roles, credentialing, peer support service models, integration of peer workers, and quality workforce development (Silver & Nemec, 2016). When defining *peeriness*, a peer worker shares the same or similar experiences with individuals who may need to use the peer services (Clark et al., 2016). Therefore, identifying what equivalent experiences are the most important to the dispatchers would be highly recommended. Varied peer roles explain the need for identifying existing roles of the peer supporter. Each individual peer supporter will have his or her own life and work experiences. It would be up to that individual to determine how much he or she is willing to share among others. The peer supporter needs to be

aware of his or her boundaries. He or she needs to understand that not all situations are going to be pleasant and be aware of when to refer the coworker to a professional.

Credentialing is mentioned as a possibility of certifying peer supporters (Silver & Nemec, 2016). It is unclear if there is any training done among the current peer supporters within law enforcement agencies. Providing training among peer supporters would allow for a clear understanding of the role the peer supporter is tasked with. Peer support service models was a section that can assist in clarifying and having a policy implemented detailed to the roles of the peer supporter. The peer support team can determine and specify specific duties among their team members. A peer support team can have several functions, depending on what objectives the team wants to establish. One would think that the objectives would align with the department's core values, and having a service model can display that. Integration of peer workers consists of peer supporters making themselves available for their coworkers. Within a dispatch center, it is providing a positive attitude in an environment that is not always positive. Finding approaches that can promote wellness, self-care, and an atmosphere of good fellowship are ways a peer support team can make a difference within a center. Finally, quality workforce development is providing information to coworkers about the purpose of what peer support is in place for and the uses it can have for individuals in one thing. However, many times dispatchers are unaware or neglect to recognize when they may need assistance in an incident or situation they have handled. Whether it is a personal incident or something that has occurred on the job, dispatchers and law enforcement in general tend to suppress their feelings. Making it known that it is okay to reach out to a peer supporter or ask for professional help can help lessen the negative perception or

misunderstanding in asking for assistance. The role of the peer supporter needs to be clarified in order to have an effective team.

Peer Support Summary

Each of these studies were based on the use of peer support, the need for peer support, the impact of peer support, and characteristics and the role of a peer supporter. Even though most of the studies did not include law enforcement, they were added to this dissertation to provide the reader with an understanding and knowledge of peer support. Each study provided different views and results, and it is apparent that there is a concern for the need of peer support among different organizations, facilities, and careers. Providing an understanding of the benefits to coworkers about peer support and what it can do to assist them can be important. Peer support occurs when individuals provide knowledge, experience, and emotional, social, or practical help to each other. Being able to reach out to someone you have worked with and knowing he or she has some knowledge about your job can be comforting. Peer support may not be needed by all, but if it can assist one individual, that is worth the effort. Making peer support known as a useful tool among coworkers is important.

It is imperative that peer supporters understand their role. Peer supporters should go through an extensive amount of continuous training in order to recognize and comprehend their role as a peer supporter. Listening rather than believing one can fix something is important to understand. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance; a peer supporter needs to respect. When an individual is confiding in another, it is important that the peer supporter keeps the information private. In building a peer support team, trust is a key aspect needed by the team. It can take a lifetime to trust an individual, and

that trust can be lost in a moment. Peer supporters need to realize that they are a representative of the team. Their actions and conduct can affect the appearance and the development of the peer support team. The following section includes a variety of different peer support programs and conferences that can be useful for building an effective peer support program. An abundance of information can be beneficial to a team as long as the team applies it properly.

Peer Support Programs

Peer support associated programs such as California Peer Support Association (CPSA), Public Safety Peer Support Association (PSPSA), The Counseling Team International (TCTI), and International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) provide education, resources, and healthy ways for first responders to deal with the emotional labor of the job. Each of these programs is specific to first responders, which include dispatch, and the founders are aware of the need for peer support. The majority of the founders of these programs are individuals who work in law enforcement themselves and, therefore, are peers. Their experience, knowledge, and participation in the programs creates a sense of reliability, trust, and authenticity. In the development of mental health or emotional wellness programs, police administrators are utilizing and witnessing the benefits of peer support programs (Williams, 2017).

California Peer Support Association

CPSA's mantra is "Helping Those That Serve Others." They provide their definition of what peer support is and how it can help an individual:

Peer support is a process where a person discusses a personal issue with a non-professional, usually a friend or a co-worker. A person will select a peer support

person primarily based upon trust. Most only share problems with someone considered credible, able to listen without judgement and capable of maintaining confidentiality. Peer support members have the responsibility to understand their role and its limitations. They are trained to employ active listening skills, to avoid “solving” or taking on the person’s problems, and when appropriate, to refer the individual to professional resources. (CPSA, n.d., “What is Peer Support and How Can it Help Me,” para. 1)

CPSA’s (n.d.) website is a source for allied agencies to share and exchange resources and post dates, times, and locations for classes and training events. Recommended books of interest for law enforcement, fire, and other emergency personnel are provided. Agencies can view and gain ideas for putting together a peer support program of their own. The site also includes sample peer support policies from a variety of agencies willing to share. There is a section for dialogue that one can post on and members can provide their input. Agencies can reach out to a member of the association for assistance and can be placed in contact with someone in their area. CPSA’s goal is to provide a website of resources and to establish the importance of a peer support program.

Public Safety Peer Support Association

Another informational peer support program is PSPSA, which was established in 2016. PSPSA’s mantra is “Mind, Body, Spirit.” Its mission statement is as follows: “Ethically and responsibly develop and implement Peer Support programs and standards to enhance the training, education, and support systems of public safety agencies” (PSPSA, n.d., para. 1). Its executive board consists of all working first responders from all over Southern California and a licensed clinical doctor who has worked with law

enforcement personnel for nearly 3 decades. PSPSA has partnered with different organizations that make an effort to enhance the education, training, and support system of public safety agencies. PSPSA is available for contact at any time for referrals, resources, and recommendations. It provides an annual conference with speakers who have dealt with traumatic incidents, clinicians who inform on a variety of topics, and provides resources for first responders and dispatchers. On the PSPSA (n.d.) website, there are personal testimonies from members to assist the viewer in understanding the purpose of his or her organization. The website provides a personal testimony from Lieutenant Lorenzo Glenn with the Anaheim Police Department who is also the President of PSPSA; he stated the following:

Early on there was no outlet for us. I was always told to, “suck it up,” “be professional,” “don’t take anything personal,” but it is hard. The biggest thanks that I get, is somebody that I don’t particularly know well, will come up to me and say, “thank you” for this program. (PSPSA, n.d., n.p.)

Several members speak about why it is so important to have a peer support program within an agency. As first responders, they hear and see the worst in society, and many times their perspective on society changes. PSPSA (n.d.) was founded upon the unshakeable belief that there is help available in the form of peer supporters.

The Counseling Team International

TCTI was established in 1985. Its mission is to provide exceptional counseling, training, and critical incident intervention and support to their clients, who include employees and their families throughout the United States. TCTI’s mental health professionals and staff are dedicated to serving those who serve with the highest

professional standards. TCTI strives to maintain a reputable standing by honoring its clients' trust and confidentiality. The founder and director, Nancy K. Bohl-Penrod, began early on providing emergency counseling for the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department. TCTI was on 24-hour standby for any officer-involved shooting. Their immediate response in conducting a critical incident stress management (CISM) service with San Bernardino Sheriff's Department decreased worker's compensation claims to a degree that TCTI was asked to expand its counseling services to all personnel and their families (The Counseling Team International [TCTI], n.d.). TCTI provides resources, handouts, links, articles, and recommended readings. It provides information for agencies to develop their own peer support program as well as classes on a variety of topics based on self-care. TCTI realized that peer support helps in decreasing the day-to-day stress of public safety professionals. Currently, TCTI has grown in helping several different agencies including police, sheriff, federal law enforcement, firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, public safety dispatchers, first responders, city and county government agencies, public school districts, private industry, and health-care providers. The need to keep employees healthy physically and mentally is significant. When employees have emotional issues, it can be difficult for them to focus on life, which will then distract them from focusing on their job. As a public servant, it is a requirement that individuals follow their mission statements and work at an efficient level.

International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.

ICISF's (n.d.) Mission Statement states, "The Mission of the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc. is to provide leadership, education, training, consultation, and support services in comprehensive crisis intervention and disaster behavioral health

services to the emergency response professions, other organizations, and communities worldwide (“Mission Statement,” para. 1). CISM is a comprehensive, integrated, multicomponent crisis intervention system. CISM is considered comprehensive because it consists of multiple crisis intervention components, which extend to the entire progressive spectrum of a crisis. CISM is an adaptive psychological helping process that focuses solely on an immediate and identifiable incident. This can include preincident preparedness to critical crisis management to postcrisis follow-up for individuals as well as groups.

ICISF follows seven core components with each component specific to the individual, group, and incident that has occurred. ICISF training focuses on critical incident stress debriefings (CISDs), which they refer to as the Mitchell model (ICISF, n.d.) seven-phase, structured group discussion. This section of the core component is done within 1 to 10 days postcrisis and designed to mitigate acute symptoms, assess the need for follow-up, and if possible, provide a sense of postcrisis psychological closure. ICISF provides training on how to conduct and facilitate each core component to assist those who have been affected by an incident. Individuals who must witness either by viewing, hearing, or both need a way to help with the emotional labor they go through. ICISF’s vision supports a world where people have access to CISM programs and services. The primary objective of ICISF is to nurture the field regarding the work and values of CISM. Many times, those who have worked a critical incident by responding on scene, hearing the incident, or being the personnel who had a part in handling the event in some way do not realize they may have been psychologically affected. ICISF trains peers, as well as individuals, who want to assist in helping peers in times of need.

ICISF's website also provides a way for agencies to reach out to one another for support during times of adversity. Their board members are a combination of first responders and clinical therapists. ICISF's overall goal is to educate individuals and society about the benefits one can achieve when knowing about CISM.

The information one can receive from the peer support programs, associations, and websites is endless. The importance of being updated, informed, and knowledgeable in what is needed by the first responder is limitless. As an agency creates a peer support program, it is important for individuals to realize that informal peer support as a routine part of the day's work was seen as integral to a successful program (Techmanski, 2014). Dispatchers have a unique connection with each other, and they share much of the same unfortunate traumatic events. They are exposed to incidents that pale in comparison to normal human experience; therefore, they can relate to one another. Relaying and sharing experiences with a peer may assist in providing some semblance of normalcy to their experiences and to help them process their emotions. Adams et al. (2014) conducted a study that explored stress and well-being among EMDs who provided crisis intervention to medical emergencies through telehealth support. Sixteen EMDs were interviewed throughout the study. When the topic of support was addressed, three individuals participated with feedback. Participant 8, a male, stated, "When you talk to other people about it, you've shared with someone. You've heard what they think, they've heard what you think . . . lightening the load" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 441). Participant 9, a female, mentioned how she becomes frustrated when things do not go right and how she is okay usually once she can verbalize herself with a peer (Adams et al., 2014). Participant 4, a female, stated how she talks to her husband who is a

paramedic and can kind of relate (Adams et al., 2014). These are just a few informal ways these EMDs cope with the job they do.

Dispatchers Achieving Relief Together

No matter how much training individuals within an agency receive, it is how the individual uses that training that will make a difference. Much like this researcher who recognized the need within her department, it may take a dispatcher who recognizes the need for a peer support program to do something about it to help the dispatchers in his or her department. After months of exploration and training, this researcher along with a coworker took it upon themselves to create a program that began within their dispatch center. Dispatchers Achieving Relief Together (D.A.R.T.) was created to assist dispatchers originally from their agency and continues to grow to other agencies. The purpose of D.A.R.T. is to become a resource that can be utilized as this researcher and her coworker recognized, understood, and overcame the negative effects of the stress that dispatchers deal with on an ongoing basis because of the negative effects of their job. D.A.R.T. directs dispatchers to local resources, educates on wellness, trains peer supporters to be available for anyone in need, and most recently is expanding to provide a service of CISDs for dispatchers who have undergone a traumatic event. Although D.A.R.T. is still in the infant stage, it continues to grow momentum. The goal of D.A.R.T. can be achieved by changing the culture within the dispatch center from the traditional dispatch culture of ignoring emotions, suppressing responses to traumatic events, and relying on unhealthy coping mechanisms to a new culture of self-care, education, and commitment to become good at coping with stress.

A peer supporter is one who is available for his or her coworker. The dispatch culture is a stoic one, much like the law enforcement field units. They train to save people, but they do not train to be saved. A peer supporter is trained at being an individual who is approachable, trustworthy and dependable, a good listener, and who will keep information confidential. According to Raskin (2016), “Peer support programs have promise: Leaders within the call center who are more informed front-line people and know about the resources, but are not supervisors, might be a less threatening way to bring support to employees” (n.p.).

Burnout

Burnout can negatively affect both an individual’s personal life and his or her employer’s in terms of decreased work quality, patient/client satisfaction, and employee retention (Johnstone et al., 2016). The stress of the dispatcher’s job can be a contributor and cause of burnout. Burnout occurs when one feels overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet what he or she may feel as constant demands. Burnout not only affects the individual but also the department and the citizens the dispatchers serve. The term *burnout* was coined by American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger (1974) and refers to the wearing out of an individual because of excessive demands on one’s resources (as cited in Johnstone et al., 2016). The demands of the dispatcher’s job can affect one dispatcher much differently than the next. As each dispatcher gains an understanding and is provided knowledge about the cause and effects of burnout, one would hope the dispatcher would want to overcome by building a resiliency against reaching burnout. Gaining a thorough understanding of burnout is important due to the detrimental effects it can have on an individual as well as what it can create within the

organization. Burnout is characterized by an inability to disengage (escape) from the work, by an overwhelming grinding pressure, a callousness, an ability to maintain a professional perspective, a sense of hopelessness, apathy, despondency, and a lack of trust (Guy et al., 2015). As research explores peer support programs, the hope is that it can address and assist in alleviating burnout among the dispatchers.

Origins of Burnout

Hakanen and Bakker's (2017) study, "Born and bred to burn out: A life-course view and Reflections on job burnout," was expanded from a 35-year follow-up study on the origins of burnout from a wider, life-course perspective. Originally, this study was part of a research project called "Some People Will Burn Out." Hakanen and Bakker continued their study by integrating two research traditions: psychological research on burnout and sociological and epidemiological research on social inequalities in health. Hakanen and Bakker defined burnout as a response to prolonged stressors at work and described it as a chronic syndrome including exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. When employees are chronically fatigued and have become cynical about their work, they encounter more problems in dealing with their daily job demands (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). Once an individual shows an increase in burnout, it may be difficult for the individual to welcome new information, opportunities for job growth and willingness to learn new things, and feedback. The employee simply becomes exhausted and develops a strong aversion to his or her job and is less likely to put effort into his or her work and more likely to make mistakes. Dispatchers cannot afford to make mistakes; when mistakes are made, they affect others. Compromising the quality of their work can cause harm to those they serve: the citizens and field personnel.

Hakanen and Bakker (2017) provided six suggestions for future research on burnout. The first suggestion was to research the development and fluctuation of burnout over the working career and life course. Researchers can gain knowledge by examining the process and recovery of burnout from the working career, life events, and life-course perspective. Examining individuals by age, generation, and stage in life is suggested; therefore, it would be a lengthy comprehensive process. Researchers would need to explore both the individual's home life and work life to gain knowledge of his or her demands. The second suggestion was to research burnout in the era of information explosion. As technology continues to change, the demands expected of an individual change. Individuals are connected to technology and are expected to respond almost immediately. This expectation of responding immediately can place stress upon an individual. The cognitive demand of learning the new technology can be an additional stressor. Dispatchers are dealing with three to four different computers at time, which does not include the programs they must learn and utilize while working. Working at an efficient level is required by most agencies (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017).

The third suggestion was to research burnout in new work contexts and in changing work life (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). Most research is done within common career titles. Dispatchers, for example, do not hold the title of first responder. Most dispatchers are titled as clerical. However, clerical workers do not work 24/7, 7 days a week, 356 days a year, during times of disaster. Clerical workers are home in the evenings and on holidays and weekends. Dispatchers work the same shift hours as the field personnel. Research should be conducted in understanding the changing nature of work. A suggestion would be to examine the individual within the workplace. For

example, many individuals work more than one job, or they work at home utilizing technology that can become frustrating to learn (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017).

The fourth suggestion was to research the relationship between burnout and job performance, which is a continual process (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). Research should be conducted among individuals who invest their time in their work as a career rather than doing the job to just get by.

The fifth suggestion was to research recovery from severe burnout (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). Investing time into individuals and gaining knowledge from them on what created their burnout would be beneficial in finding out what helped them to recover and what they plan on doing to continue to recover. Several individuals were interviewed who had suffered from becoming burned out on their job. After they returned to work, these individuals mentioned how they became more sensitive to the signs of job stress and the working conditions that reminded them of the feelings of becoming burned out.

The sixth and final suggestion was to research being “on fire,” a risk factor for burnout (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). One of the most cited and taken-for-granted statements of burnout research has posited that “in order to burn out a person needs to have been on fire at one time” (Pines et al., 1981, p. 4). This area of research has been contradictory. Other studies (Hakanen, Peeters, & Schaufeli, 2018) have found individuals who have felt that work engagement projected less burnout. The article concluded that after 40 years of research exposed on the topic of burnout, it is imperative that additional and continued research be conducted (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017).

Training employees to recognize their stressors, understand how to deal with those

stresses, and become knowledgeable in resiliency could help create a different atmosphere within the culture of the dispatch center (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017).

Solutions to the Problem of Burnout

Maslach (2017), in his study, “Finding Solutions to the Problem of Burnout,” explained how burnout has been a topic since the 1970s. It would be somewhat dangerous for public servants and caregivers to find themselves in a position of burnout because their job is to help others. In earlier days, there was no name for burnout, and it was seldom acknowledged or discussed openly. In most law enforcement cultures, it is still a taboo to openly acknowledge or discuss the signs of burnout for reasons such as showing signs of weakness (Miller, 2014), unsafe work environments, or beliefs that employees are whining or complaining about their job.

Maslach (2017) explained how the earlier works of burnout were not framed within any existing theory. The concept and definition of burnout developed empirically from the exploratory research and were labeled soon after as a form of job stress. Three dimensions of the burnout experience emerged from this early work: exhaustion, cynicism, and a decline in professional efficacy. The exhaustion dimension was described as having lost energy, and feeling worn out, depleted, and fatigued. The cynicism dimension was described as having a negative attitude, being withdrawn, or becoming irritable. The inefficacy dimension was described as having low morale, an inability to cope, and reduced productivity. Employees who find themselves experiencing burnout are overwhelmed, unable to cope, and unmotivated, and they display negative attitudes and poor performance.

Three critical issues are presented: the psychology-centric focus of burnout, fixing the person versus fixing the job, and new ideas about solutions. The first critical issue, psychology-centric focus of burnout, is broken into two sections: positive effects of a psychological approach and negative effects of a psychological approach (Maslach, 2017). Burnout affects an individual's personal, social, organizational, and economic status. Individuals show signs of low morale, impaired physical health, poor job performance, absenteeism, turnover, and greater risk of mental illness. These signs define a serious problem in burnout and argue against the naysayers who argue the idea that burnout is just "someone complaining or whining about work" (Maslach, 2017, p. 144). Another positive effect that was introduced was the concept of work engagement. This included looking at the positive aspects within one's worksite by being dedicated and engaged. Organizations did not want the term *burnout* to be mentioned or brought up because of the fear of facing possible lawsuits based on unsafe work environments.

Findings from several decades of burnout research have found that situational and environmental factors seem to be as important for understanding burnout as are personal variables (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). The culture of the work environment can play a significant role in an employee becoming burned out. An emphasis has been placed on the importance of social relationships in the job context. Having a good relationship between coworkers including supervision and management has been a factor in the burnout experience. Work environments that have been known to be toxic with unresolved conflict, lack of mutual trust and support, and bullying have also been factors in creating burnout among individuals. The final concept within the positive effects of a psychological approach is the areas-of-worklife model (AW). This allows the integration

of both the individual and the workplace placing emphasis on how burnout results from the interaction of the person and the job rather than the source of burnout the person or the job is. The negative effects of a psychological approach have been to understand and incorporate that burnout is not just an individual experience within the person. Although burnout has been studied within the individual, the workplace can play a role in creating those feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Burnout has been denounced as a sign of weakness or incompetence; therefore, individuals hide their feelings. The culture of organizations has created a fear for employees to suggest making change. This fear has extended to employees not being willing to reach out to colleagues and ask for help. Implications for burnout have been known to be one of blaming the victim, which then creates an additional psychological trauma for the victim. Organizations that mean well and try to promote a healthy atmosphere need to do their due diligence when searching for ways in assisting their employees. Employees may feel they are being patronized. For those organizations that continue to assist in finding ways to help within the departments, it is an admirable goal (Maslach, 2017).

The second critical issue is fixing the person versus fixing the job (Maslach, 2017). Since the early framework of burnout was focused on the individual needing to adjust in order to cope with or prevent burnout, an array of ideas have been provided in keeping oneself healthy. This critical issue is broken down into three sections: fixing the person, social support, and fixing the job.

Fixing the person provides information on health and fitness, relaxation, self-understanding, coping skills, and changes in work patterns. Each suggestion provides specific details in helping the individual no matter what his or her position may be. For

example, changing one's expectations of his or her job will allow the individual to not become disappointed when a situation of concern arises. Dispatchers need to be flexible as the job continuously changes. Change for many can be difficult; however, a dispatcher needs to find a way to understand the change and learn how to embrace it (Maslach, 2017).

The second section is social support. One should reach out to a member of peer support, a supervisor he or she feels comfortable talk with. Employees sometimes just need to feel heard. Fixing the job is the last section within the second critical issue. Employees are limited to what they can actually change within their departments. In organizations where burnout is a potential issue, it would be beneficial to clarify the problem and begin looking for solutions specific to burnout. Gaining a perspective from the individuals who do the job and allowing them to express what sets off their frustrations and focusing on solutions maybe one way to address the issue (Maslach, 2017).

The third critical issue, new ideas about solutions, Maslach (2017) explained how preventing burnout is a better strategy than waiting to treat it after it becomes a problem. A preventative strategy could be set in place, in which steps are taken to minimize the risk of burnout before it happens. Building engagement among employees is another way to keep employees from always looking for the negative within the department. As employees are engaged, they are feeling heard and can focus on making changes for the better. Another issue is job-person fit, determining if the individual and the job environment (culture) are a fit. The demands of the job may be too great for the individual, which causes undue stress (Maslach, 2017).

The AW model addresses six key areas in which imbalances take place: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and value (Maslach, 2017). Almost each one of these key areas carries a positive and negative approach depending on the situation. When the workload is excessive, there is little time to recover, rest, or restore balance. Researchers have identified a link to high levels of stress and burnout in employees who feel they have little to no control over a situation. This can be turned around when employees receive an amount of control in making decisions within the organization. Rewarding your employees with acknowledgments can help in preventing burnout. The opposite affect can occur when employers show an insufficient amount of recognition toward employees. The community of workers relate to those they work with. When employees believe that there is a lack of support and trust, they can become cynical. However, when employees feel supported and can work out disagreements in an effective way, they feel engaged. Fairness and values are what employees want within a department. When employees believe they are being treated fairly, they are content. The opposite occurs when they feel they are not being treated fairly (Maslach, 2017). In a longitudinal study, Maslach and Leiter (2016) found that organizational employees who were experiencing a mismatch in the area of fairness were more likely to score higher on burnout the following year. Maslach (2017) concluded her article by providing an updated “fit” list. These needs are autonomy, belongingness, competence, psychosocial safety, positive emotions, fairness, and meaning. Each has been linked to intrinsic work motivation and well-being. It is up to the departments to design and modify the workplace to include these needs in hopes of supporting their employees. Burnout is threatening, it is real, and it needs to be addressed.

Employee Performance and Coping Skills

Carmona, Buunk, Peiro, Rodriguez, and Bravo (2006) provided research on employee performance and coping styles in relation to burnout. In their article, “Do Social Comparison and Coping Styles Play a Role in the Development of Burnout? Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Findings,” they begin with introducing professional burnout. Because professional burnout is known to be the result of chronic stress in the work situation and is generally considered syndrome consisting of three aspects: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishments, the researchers reiterated Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) insight into these meanings. The first aspect, emotional exhaustion, is the feeling of being “worn out” and “empty” (Carmon et al., 2006, p. 85). A lack of emotional resources for employees may be a contributor to these feelings. Another aspect of burnout is depersonalization. This is where employees have a cynical attitude toward their work, peers, or those they serve. The third sign of burnout is a feeling of defeat, being unaccomplished, and evaluating one’s accomplishments in a negative way. These signs are unfortunate but are known to occur within jobs that are in direct contact with the public (Carmon et al., 2006).

The participants in the study were teachers in primary and secondary schools in the province of Valencia, Spain (Carmon et al., 2006). Questionnaires were sent out randomly; 1,675 teachers received the questionnaires and only 659 respondents returned the questionnaires. The questionnaires were based upon stress and life quality in schools. Burnout was assessed with the widely used Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey. Research focused on the role of upward comparisons, downward comparisons, and coping styles in relation to burnout. Upward comparison is when individuals engage with

peers who they may feel is performing more competently and adequately than themselves. The positive effect in an upward comparison is that individuals focus on the similarities and can relate and feel good that they too have achieved something. The negative side is when an individual compares him or herself with the other and feels defeated for not having the same or more. The downward comparison is when one engages with individuals less competent or inadequate. The positive effect references the downward comparison, which is not necessarily socially desirable when an individual distances him or herself from the less competent individual because of his or her lack of knowledge or status. The negative effect is that the individual decides to also feel less competent and defeated, keeping him or herself from achieving goals (Carmon et al., 2006).

The next section of the study explains coping styles related to burnout as well as social comparison (Carmon et al., 2006). Carmon et al. (2006) explained, “Coping has been defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the demands that are created as a consequence of a stressful transaction (Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980)” (p. 3). Carmon et al.’s article provides the reader with a few different coping styles such as direct, palliative, active, and avoidance. Each of the coping styles presented was either negatively related to burnout or positively related to burnout; however, the research was unable to specifically relate or provide evidence that the copying styles are related to the development of burnout over time (Carmon et al., 2006). Coping styles and social comparison focused on the previous explanation of the upward and downward comparisons. Overall, the study concluded that teachers who used a direct coping style had lower levels of burnout and teachers who used a palliative

coping style had higher levels of burnout. Another conclusion showed that those who identified with others who are doing well or poorly may play in the development of burnout over time (Carmon et al., 2006).

Differences in the Level of Burnout

Ahola et al.'s (2006) study, "Burnout in the General Population," investigated differences in the level of burnout between groups based on various factors. The sociodemographic factors of interest included gender, age, education, type of employment, work experience, socioeconomic status, working time, and marital status. The study explained how burnout consists of three qualitative dimensions (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy), which are ideally distinct yet empirically related. Exhaustion refers to feelings of overstrain, tiredness, or fatigue resulting from long-term involvement in an overdemanding work situation. Cynicism reflects an unsympathetic and distant attitude toward work. Employees may become disengaged and no longer feel enthused to be working within the organization. The third dimension is lack of professional efficacy. Burnout was first noticed in jobs that consisted of human service work. The results of the study observed burnout to be positively related to age. Young employees aged 30 to 40 years felt signs of burnout, which occurred early in their work career. Burnout among women was related to education, socioeconomic status, and work experience. Women who related to having a low basic education, being a blue-collar worker, and having at least 17 years of experience within the same profession scored the highest in burnout. The result for men showed that marital status played a role in their feeling of burnout. Men who were single, divorced, or widowed scored higher in burnout. Burnout is a persistent negative

work-related state of mind, which develops increasingly as a consequence of a prolonged stress situation at work. Many times, emergency dispatchers find themselves overwhelmed with the daily call volume, unpleasant reporting parties, and the emotional labor that goes into being a dispatcher. Although departments cannot control the number of calls that enter through their call centers, the unpleasantness of the reporting parties, or the emotional aspects of the calls, they can educate, instruct, and find ways to assist their employees in dealing with the stress of the job (Ahola et al., 2006).

Much like the previous article, Guy et al. (2015) in their book, *Emotional Labor: Putting the Service in Public Service*, defined the principle dimensions of burnout as emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. Exhaustion is known to be the central quality and a well-known indicator of burnout. One employee expressed how emotionally exhausting he/she felt: “Our jobs are far more difficult emotionally because you have to overcome your own feelings and their feelings and try to make something happen at the same time” (Guy et al., 2015, p. 30). Being responsible for one’s own feelings is difficult; however, having to overcome both one’s feelings and those of another to get the job done can be exhausting and emotionally laboring. Workers who perform emotional labor under conditions of low job autonomy or high job involvement are thought to be at greater risk of emotional exhaustion than those who have more autonomy or less job involvement (Wharton, 1993). Cynicism is a hardening or deadening of emotions and can be another sign of burnout. Many times, dispatchers find relief in joking about an incident that may not be appropriate to joke about. The callousness and cynical joke may be offensive to those who do not understand that the public servant is just masking his or her feelings behind the joke. Cynicism is when one

depersonalizes him or herself from the client and the incident. The individual changes from being empathetic to apathetic, which is unfortunate for those the individual serves. The third dimension of burnout is ineffectiveness on the job. Ineffectiveness begins when an individual feels overwhelmed, exhausted, and becomes cynical. Individuals reflect on their work situation with a perception of feeling unaccomplished. Feelings that they are unable to assist and make a difference in the lives of those they serve can bring about feelings of helplessness. Public servants get a sense of job satisfaction when they do something well for those they serve. A sense of accomplishment for the public servant settles in. On the other hand, helping too much without feeling appreciated can also burn out an employee. The dual relationship of highs and lows in doing the public servant job brings about feelings of engagement and burnout. Finding coping mechanisms is highly recommended, and failure to develop these mechanisms can result in burnout among employees.

Effects of Burnout

Turner (2017), in her article, “Preventing Burnout,” expressed her concern about the effects of burnout. As a communications manager, Turner was fully aware of the destruction burnout can have within a dispatch center. Turner addressed three questions “to ask before formulating a plan to address the problem of burnout—what is it, how does it affect me, and what can I do about it for myself and my staff?” (p. 26). Turner based her definition on the coined term of 1970s by American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger. Merely put, “burnout is a condition that affects individuals in the helping professions who experience the long-term, chronic stress that comes from the responsibility of providing assistance to those in need” (Turner 2017, p. 26). She goes on

to explain how burnout leads individuals to feeling emotionally and physical exhausted, which can appear to others as cynicism and detachment. Pierce and Lilly (2012) found that nearly 22% of 171 dispatchers were at risk of developing PTSD. Turner (2017) stated that the first step in preventing burnout is knowledge. Providing knowledge and gaining an understanding of what burnout is may assist dispatchers in recognizing what they may be feeling and going through. Dispatchers need to realize that the feelings they are having are normal for the distinct job they do. Turner concluded with “the road forward” (Turner, 2017, p. 27), providing a few suggestions in mitigating the burnout cycle. Changing the mindset can assist one in remembering why he or she has chosen the job of a 911 emergency dispatcher.

At Risk for PTSD

Raskin (2016), in her article, “PTSD and Emergency Telecommunicators,” showed that dispatchers are at risk for PTSD in a similar way as police officers. Raskin’s original study was based on Pierce and Lilly’s (2012) study, “Duty-Related Trauma Exposure in 911 Telecommunicators: Considering the Risk of Post-Traumatic Stress.” The study included approximately 170 telecommunicator participants from across the country. Less than a year later a follow-up study was done, which included over 800 participants. Pierce and Lilly’s article in *The Journal of Traumatic Stress* provided a Q and A with Dr. Lilly herself. The first question asked was, “How does PTSD in dispatchers look different from other forms of PTSD?” (Raskins, 2016, n.p.). The answer was that it does not look any different. The study showed that PTSD among telecommunicators is somewhere between 18% and 24%. It is known that PTSD can develop when a person has had a lot of cumulative trauma exposure. The *Diagnostic and*

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association (2013) has posted that hearing about someone else's trauma has been removed as a potential traumatic event, unless that event is particularly violent in nature. DSM has specifically stated that being continually exposed to graphic, traumatic details of events as part of one's job does fall into the definition of trauma, which fits the role of a dispatcher. The intensity of in-progress incidents that a dispatcher handles can be grim. Hearing a mother screaming for her child who they just found deceased, hearing the gurgling from someone who has just been shot or being shot themselves, or hearing the cries of a young child who is witnessing their parents fighting are incidents the dispatcher must listen to in doing his or her job. After difficult calls, dispatchers may show many of the classic posttraumatic reactions and symptoms, but they are often overlooked by police supervisors and consulting mental health clinicians alike (Miller, 2014). PTSD occurs when people handle calls that are particularly distressing or upsetting and that stick with them for a long period of time (Raskin, 2016). The dispatcher's job is assisting the public and the field units; therefore, listening to the reporting party and extracting information from them can become stressful.

The second question asked was, "What symptoms stood out among dispatchers in the study in your opinion?" (Raskin, 2016, n.p.). Four system clusters were provided:

- (1) avoidance (avoiding thoughts, memories, or feelings that bring back memories of a particularly upsetting call);
- (2) numbing (feeling detached, feeling as though the world has changed, or feeling that the world is a bad, malicious place);
- (3) hypervigilance (having a strong startle response, feeling on edge all the time, or having trouble concentrating or sleeping);
- and (4) re-experiencing (flashbacks,

unwanted thoughts, or thoughts about the call that come up repeatedly). (Raskin, 2016, n.p.)

When the data were taken, the one cluster that the dispatchers commonly reported was hypervigilance, feelings of being on high alert, difficulty sleeping, and not being able to calm down. Some dispatchers reported the use of alcohol and drugs to fall asleep.

The third question was, “Did you obtain data comparing smaller agencies to larger agencies?” (Raskin, 2016, n.p.). Data showed that there were no differences in mental health, physical health, job satisfaction, and coping no matter the agency size, although there were small differences between urban versus rural areas. Rural areas reported worse mental health issues such as depression. Urban settings reported higher job satisfaction and world assumptions. The number one reason dispatchers would not quit their job was due to the job benefits and being the breadwinner.

The fourth question asked was, “What type of scenario seems to be a key trigger for telecommunicators?” (Raskin, 2016, n.p.). The number one trigger was calls involving juveniles. It did not matter if the call involved the death, injury, or sexual assault of the juvenile, it affected the dispatcher in some way. This type of exposure for the dispatcher leaves him or her open to high risk of adverse mental health and functioning. An additional high trigger for the dispatcher was officer-involved shootings or line-of-duty deaths. Another question asked was, “Did you acquire any data on physical health complaints common among dispatchers?” (Raskin, 2016, n.p.). Results showed that about 83% of dispatchers in the study were obese or overweight. Some common complaints were headaches, backaches, insomnia, heartburn, and upset stomachs. Lilly mentioned that a future topic of study among dispatchers that she had

planned was to check the dysregulation of cortisol (Raskin, 2016). The focus of that study would be to locate a link specific to cortisol and recurrent stress on the job. Shift work was an issue among dispatchers because it appeared to interfere with sleep, impacting metabolism, and releasing the hormone ghrelin. Ghrelin prompts hunger signals. Another question asked was, “Do you have any conclusions about treatment for telecommunicators after PTSD has set in?” (Raskin, 2016, n.p.). Seeing a licensed psychologist was suggested. Dispatchers are in a good position to recover from their PTSD with access to treatments focusing on prolonged exposure and cognitive processing therapy (Raskin, 2016). The final question asked was, “Knowing that some of these things can help people, do you have an opinion on how to help telecommunicators notice their symptoms and treat them?” (Raskin, 2016, n.p.). Providing dispatchers with an understanding and knowledge of what stress, burnout, and PTSD are can be a start. Providing online quizzes that focus on wellness can provide the dispatcher with feedback and direct them to resources and interventions. Until agencies begin to identify and recognize the signs of PTSD among their dispatchers, the culture will remain the same (Raskin, 2016).

Pierce and Lilly (2012), in their article, “Duty-Related Trauma Exposure in 911 Telecommunicators: Considering the Risk for Posttraumatic Stress,” explained that there was limited research assessed on PTSD symptomatology in 911 telecommunicators. There was also no examination of whether the association between peritraumatic distress and PTSD symptoms held for this population. The study reported high levels of “peritraumatic distress and a moderate positive relationship was found between peritraumatic distress and PTSD symptoms” (Pierce & Lilly, 2012, p. 211).

Lilly and Pierce (2013) wrote an additional article, “PTSD and Depressive Symptoms in 911 Telecommunicators: The Role of Peritraumatic Distress and World Assumptions in Predicting Risk,” in which they described peritraumatic distress as a psychological condition that puts an individual at increased risk for depression and PTSD. Their 2012 study (Pierce & Lilly, 2012) consisted of a convenience sample of 171 randomly selected 911 telecommunicators, and a total of 24 different states were represented. The study coded types of calls to determine the intensity for the dispatcher. The coding categorized the severity of certain types of calls—intense fear, helplessness, or horror—and whether the types of calls were more consistently identified by the sample as the “worst.” Results showed that 32% of the participants frequently encountered feelings of intense fear, helplessness, and horror because of the calls they handled. The study proposed that although dispatchers are physically distant from the traumatic scene and their personal integrity is rarely threatened, they may not be shielded from the development of PTSD symptoms (Lilly & Pierce, 2013). This is an enormous breakthrough for telecommunicators and dispatchers everywhere because many do not understand the severity of their symptoms. The result of the study suggested that 911 telecommunicators are exposed to duty-related trauma that may lead to the development of PTSD and that direct physical exposure to trauma may not be necessary to increase risk for PTSD in this population (Lilly & Pierce, 2013).

During the course of their duties, a police call taker or dispatcher experiences repeated secondary exposure to life-and-death situations, either by an officer in the field or by a citizen calling 9-1-1. This repeated secondary exposure falls into the class of acute traumatic stress (Nussman, 2012). Although dispatchers are public servants and

begin with a willingness to help the citizens, it can become daunting. As dispatchers answer the calls from the public, they are continuously dealing with some sort of issue. Whether the dispatchers agree with the issue or not, they have to adhere to their department's policy and procedures. This repeated exposure can become exhausting. Secondary traumatic stress (STS) results from wanting to help a traumatized person, which encompasses the work of call takers and dispatchers (Turner, 2015). The emotional labor that the emergency dispatcher faces on duty can become wearing, tiresome, and hard to deal with. Unlike the field units, dispatchers cannot always unplug from their assignment. They cannot always take a walk and de-stress. Unlike field units, many dispatchers do not receive a debriefing. The exclusion of dispatchers from postincident debriefings and the denial of other provisional coping mechanisms provided to other personnel are counterintuitive because dispatchers provide a lifeline of support to field personnel and theoretically suffer the same fight-or-flight physiology response as field personnel (Williams, 2017). Dispatchers have expressed feeling valued and that it is important to be included in debriefings with the field units (Adams et al., 2014). For reasons unexplained, dispatchers are not always included. Dispatchers need to begin to acknowledge that the job they do is stressful, and with assistance, they can learn to be good with dealing with the stress. With the potential impact of compassion fatigue, STS and burnout are becoming increasingly well recognized, and it has been suggested that increasing awareness of these issues is a matter of professional responsibility (Salston & Figley, 2003). Recognizing the signs and triggers that cause dispatchers to become stressed may assist in postponing burnout among them. Providing peer support to one another and directing their coworkers to resources and tools can assist them in alleviating

burnout. Keeping the dispatchers conditioned means that they are to be mentally, physically, and spiritually healthy. Investing in the dispatchers by establishing a change in the culture may create physically and mentally healthy dispatchers. The job of the dispatcher is emotional, and the emotional work can result in burnout if the employee fails to develop coping mechanisms (Guy et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Emotional Labor

Guy et al. (2015) wrote about public service jobs and the effect they have on the employee. They researched three different careers: social work, department of corrections, and emergency dispatchers. Each career is handled by a public servant who deals with unfortunate incidents in some way or another (Guy et al., 2015). For the purpose of this dissertation, the information regarding the emergency dispatcher is the focus and is used to explain how those who work in the field of public service deal with emotional labor. Guy et al. defined emotional labor as follows:

Emotional labor is that work which requires the engagement, suppression, and/or evocation of the worker's emotions in order to get the job done. The goal of this work is to influence the actions of the other. The performance encompasses a range of personal and interpersonal skills, including the ability to evoke and display emotions one does not actually feel, to sense the effect of the other and alter one's own affect accordingly, and to elicit the desired emotional response from the other. The ability to sense the effect of the other is accomplished through intuition and communication. Simply put, emotional labor requires

affective sensitivity and flexibility with one's own emotions as well as those of the other. (p. 97)

Jobs that require frontline customer service during crisis situations are emotionally intense. The dispatcher who is the first of the first responders deals not only with his or her emotions but also with the emotions of those he or she speaks with over the phone or radio. A dispatcher explained how he copes with the job and the emotional challenges of caring and not caring at the same time:

On the one hand you're supposed to be empathizing and help people deal with it, but once you get to the time that they need you the most, you have to shut your feelings down and deal with the situation. So, you have to care and not care at the same time. . . . You're not shutting [your feelings] down, you're shutting them down while you are in crisis mode. . . . I don't know how to tell you how it happens but it's like you just put the brakes on your emotions, you go level, you start to take them level, or try to get what you need to get help to 'em. (Guy et al., 2015, p. 34)

There is a mixture of emotional and technical skills that the dispatcher must be capable of handling. The level of complexity that the dispatcher deals with at work is not found in any other service job. There are highs and lows to the emotional work that the dispatcher does, and at some point, those highs must outweigh the lows in order for the dispatcher to return.

This section describes several components that fall under the definition of emotional labor. Many (not all) of these components are either used or are characteristics of the emergency dispatcher. The following components are significant in defining

emotional labor for this dissertation. One example is *verbal judo*: used in law enforcement to describe “tough talk” banter (Guy et al., 2015, p. 5). Dispatchers who communicate over the phone and radio need to be efficient at it and know how to speak through confrontation. Many times, dispatchers need to defuse a situation with a reporting party to receive the information that is needed for the safety of those involved in the incident and the deputy in the field. Knowing how to speak to the reporting party and the field units is significant. Verbal judo skills are necessary to remain centered and focused while assisting the reporting party. It is vital that the dispatcher remains professional on the phone and over the air on the radio.

Another component is *spider sense*: “the ability to intuit the other’s emotional state” (Guy et al., 2015, p. 5). Having an intuition when working both with the public and with the field units allows the dispatcher to have a sense of foreseeing what could happen, whether it is a good or bad. While dispatchers are on the phone with the public, they need to hear and figure out what is occurring beyond what the reporting party has provided. Deutsch (2015), in an article in *USA Today*, “That Domestic Violence PSAP Came From a Real 911 Call Posted on Reddit,” provided an incident where a dispatcher recounted as he was answering 911 calls. The dispatcher explained that he received a call from a female requesting to order a pizza but, in all actuality, she was calling 911 for help. The female was in a domestic violence situation and took it upon herself to call 911 hoping the dispatcher would send law enforcement to her location. It took some dialogue between the dispatcher and the female before the dispatcher realized that the female was not making a prank call. The dispatcher’s intuition needed to be present because the reporting party was not able to provide the usual safety questions that dispatchers ask.

The dispatcher needs to decipher whether the reporting party is in danger, even if he or she says he or she is not or provide misleading information. This can be done by listening to the tone of the reporting party's voice, the background noise, or the questions and answers that the reporting party is providing to the dispatcher. Spider sense is the ability to understand something nearly immediately without the need for conscious reasoning, therefore, having an intuition (Guy et al., 2015).

Another component is *rapport*: "the ability to establish a deep understanding and communication with the other" (Guy et al., 2015, p. 5). There are times that the dispatcher needs to get pertinent information from the reporting party. This can be done by establishing a bond with the individual by building a rapport and gaining the trust of the reporting party. A social worker speaks about the nature of her job: "Developing a relationship in order to get her clients to tell their deepest and darkest going on's is part of building that rapport with her clients" (Guy et al., 2015, p. 41). The ability to develop a rapport with a reporting party can be key to an investigation. For example, a dispatch center received calls every day for a week, about 20 calls each day, from a guy who called numerous times making false calls on what could have been a life-or-death emergency. One of the dispatchers was able to build a rapport with the individual. Although he did not provide an address, he gave the dispatcher his father's name. This allowed the dispatcher to locate his address. This may not seem like a big deal; however, for the department receiving the calls and tying up the phone line it is. Building a rapport can also assist the dispatcher who is speaking with a suicidal subject. As the dispatcher gains the individual's trust, the dispatcher's hope is to change the individual's mind about wanting to hurt him or herself. Whether the reporting party is a victim or suspect, his or

her information may provide clarity that can assist in solving an incident for the field unit and saving a life (Guy et al., 2015).

The three components that were addressed provide the reader an insight into what the dispatcher needs to be able to do on the job. To recap the last three components, verbal judo is needed as the dispatcher must be able to communicate with the public as well as with his or her coworkers, even if it means coming across as being assertive to relay information to their field units. Dispatchers who have spider sense have some sort of intuition, insight, and a sixth sense to be able to assist the public as well as the field units. To foresee situations prior to them occurring places the dispatcher on a high alert. However, this may assist the reporting party and/or the field unit in the situation they are facing. Spider sense is something that is hard to teach but possible to learn with life experiences (Guy et al., 2015).

The third component, rapport, can also be difficult for some who might feel that asking so many personal questions maybe too intrusive. The more information the dispatcher can retrieve from a reporting party, the better equipped the field unit will be in assisting the reporting party. It is imperative that the dispatcher finds a way to form a connection with the reporting party to receive needed information (Guy et al., 2015).

The three components that were discussed make the dispatcher good at what he or she does on his or her job. Dispatchers who are trained in verbal judo need to talk with the reporting parties, gather the information, and relay it to the field units. As the dispatcher learns about verbal judo, it makes it easier for the dispatcher to understand and learn why he or she may need to build a rapport with an individual. Gaining the trust of the reporting party allows the dispatcher to acquire more information that he or she may

not have received if trust was not gained. Spider sense may not be as easy to teach; however, it may be possible to heighten the dispatcher's senses with on-the-job experiences, life experiences, and knowledge of what he or she is listening for and why. The next few components relate to the caring part of the job (Guy et al., 2015).

Caring and Compassion

Emotional labor jobs are known to be engaging. Some employees find themselves suppressing their emotions; however, the vivid evocation of an incident can cause for unwanted memories. Most dispatchers enter the job field having some empathy and compassion for the public they serve. *Caritas* captures the caring function in human services (Guy et al., 2015). A number of studies have shown that those who are in the field of serving the public, such as dispatchers, have a need to aid in a caring way. Tracy and Tracy (1998) explained that dispatchers sometimes experience sadness and distress while helping others during a tragic moment. Most human service professionals work in public service rather than in for-profit businesses (Guy et al., 2015). It becomes natural for the public servant to want to help others and feel sympathy for the reporting party. A dispatcher provided her thoughts on empathy, emotion suppression, and managing the emotions of the caller:

Citizens don't realize that just because you're sitting behind a phone and all they're hearing is a voice doesn't mean that you're not feeling what they're going through, because sometimes it is terrifying to us because you can't help but put yourself in those positions. You don't want them to know you are scared, too. I mean that's the bottom line—they're reacting to what you do so you don't have any choices but try to stay calm. (Guy et al., 2015, p. 66)

As the dispatcher embraces the emotional work of the job, he or she needs to acknowledge the capacity for nurturance, empathy, and care as well as fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety it takes to do the job. This will help in some levels of coping as the dispatcher becomes overwhelmed with one of these feelings. Unfortunately, many times those who are known to help others lack in asking help for themselves.

This brings us to the next component, *compassion fatigue*: used in social work to describe burnout resulting from too much *caritas* (Guy et al., 2015). The constant demands from caring either for the public or the field unit can wear on the dispatcher. Boundless empathy and compassion toward those the dispatcher serves can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. Hearing the demands of the public and field units 8, 10, and 12 hours, 3 to 4 times a week can be strenuous for an individual. Compassion fatigue has been described as the potential impact of working with traumatized individuals, such as a reduction in the capacity or interest in bearing the suffering of others (Figley, 2002), physical and emotional exhaustion, and a pronounced reduction in the ability to feel empathy and compassion for others (Elwood, Mott, Lohr, & Galovski, 2011; Evces, 2015; Mathieu, 2007). Compassion fatigue is one component that can consume dispatchers without them even realizing the effect it has on them. Figley (2002) suggested that professionals who have a high capacity for feeling and expressing empathy are more at risk of compassion fatigue. As the dispatcher finds him or herself caring too much, he or she is not able to express that empathy while on the phone with the reporting party or on the air with the field unit.

The last caring component is *emotional engagement*: the ability to connect with the other and empathize (Guy et al., 2015). The dispatchers are trained to retrieve

specific information, relying on the answers from the reporting party. The dispatcher builds that rapport with the reporting party in hopes of receiving the information needed. Although the dispatcher is encouraged to receive information needed, he or she is not encouraged to connect and empathize to a point that it affects the incident itself, those involved in the incident, or the dispatcher's job. A dispatcher should not be an influence or provide his or her own opinion when speaking to a reporting party because this can be a liability issue for the department the dispatcher works for.

Managing Emotions

Many times, dispatchers find themselves hiding their emotions by suppressing them. As previously stated, dispatchers are discouraged from allowing their personal opinion to influence a reporting party. Therefore, the dispatcher needs to put his or her opinions and feelings on hold in order to get the job he or she is there for done. The following components are about managing emotions, whether it be the dispatcher managing his or her emotions or how the dispatcher conducts him or herself in trying to manage the reporting party's emotions. The first component is *emotional suppression*: "that of which is required to disregard one's own feelings" (Guy et al., 2015, p. 5). The dispatcher learns how to set aside his or her emotional feelings to be able to function while working. This allows the dispatcher to assist the reporting party or field unit in a timely manner without allowing his or her feelings to get involved. Emotions are placed on hold during stressful situations in order to get the job done. Dispatchers divert to their training, which is getting help to the reporting party or the field unit without hesitation. Little does the dispatcher realize that after a prolonged time of suppressing these feelings, it may cause other reciprocations.

The next managing component is *emotional mask*: “that which results when workers convincingly suppress their own emotions in order to act as if they feel a contradictory emotion or no emotion” (Guy et al., 2015, p. 6). Once again, the dispatcher suppresses his or her emotions; however, this time the dispatcher is convincing him or herself to feel a certain way. One dispatcher explained how she prepares when going to work: “It’s just when I come in here I’m-it’s like you put on a coat of armor, you know, you just, you have to be kinda tough” (Guy et al., 2015, p. 35). The protection the dispatcher speaks about is not of a physical nature, it is of an emotional nature. This protects the dispatcher to get through his or her shift.

The next managed component elaborates on that coat of armor. *Emotional armor* “is the ability to gird oneself against one’s own emotional response” (Guy et al., 2015). Dispatchers are trained to not sound emotional while they are handling situations. Blocking their emotions while they are speaking with the reporting party is needed to get the pertinent information relayed to the field units. While the dispatcher is speaking to the reporting party, it is important that he or she remains professional by sounding professional and not allowing personal feelings to get in the way of handling the incident. The dispatcher needs to remain unbiased at all times, no matter who he or she is speaking to, victim or suspect.

The next similar component is *emotional teflon*, the ability to protect oneself from an emotional reaction (Guy et al., 2015). In order for the dispatcher to protect him or herself from an emotional reaction, he or she needs to be aware of his or her feelings, to figure out what may trigger an emotional reaction and learn how to respond rather than react. The dispatcher handles a variety of calls. The dispatcher does not know what the

next call he or she receives will be like. Calls that hit too close to home can be a trigger. One dispatcher expressed that suicidal calls are a trigger that reminds her about her friend who committed suicide (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). Although the suicidal call was a trigger for the dispatcher, she was fully aware that she still needed to respond to the caller's needs. Without knowing what kind of call will be received, the dispatcher recognizes the need to be prepared. Whether the reporting party is extremely nice and helpful or angry and disgruntled, the dispatcher needs to know how to respond rather than react and not allow the situation to change him or her. Reacting without much thought can be disastrous to the situation at hand. Because the dispatcher is a representative of the department, it is important that he or she behaves in a professional manner. It is important that the dispatcher knows the difference between reacting and responding and implements a response rather than a reaction when speaking with the public.

The following managed components are based on personal efficacy. "Efficacy pertains to individual differences among workers and is not dependent on organizational context" (Guy et al., 2015, p. 111). If this is the case, individuals choose their attitude. One way the dispatcher can do this is by deep acting. Deep acting refers to convincingly pretending to feel a given emotion. The definition originated with Hochschild (1983, 2012) as emotional labor was being explored. Convincing an individual to feel a specific way is one way for the dispatcher to control his or her feelings and emotions. Dispatchers can easily tell themselves that their job requires them to deal with unfriendly people by hiding their true feelings about a situation and/or by pretending to have emotions that they do not really feel. Although the dispatcher may feel it is the job's fault, is it fair to blame the job?

The next managed component is similar to the previous component. *Emotional façade* is the ability to express an emotion one does not actually feel. There are many times that dispatchers are frustrated with receiving nonemergency calls on 911. However, the dispatcher is not able to express that, nor should he or she since he or she is a public servant. The dispatcher needs to remember that the public is not trained in being a reporting party in the same way the employee is trained in being a dispatcher. Remaining polite and courteous is the job of the dispatcher as he or she is a public servant.

The last component that relates to the dispatcher's job is directed toward the dispatcher managing the reporting party's emotional status. Emotion management focuses on the worker's job of eliciting the desired emotional response from the citizen. Dispatchers must know not only how to channel their own emotions but also how to channel the reporting party's emotions. Tracy and Tracy (1998) showed that one of the most stressful parts of being a dispatcher is dealing with the reporting party's hysteria in high-priority calls such as robberies, intruders, suicides, and domestic violence. Dispatchers express irritation when reporting parties do not answer their questions. Dispatchers need to use their verbal judo skills to create dialogue with the reporting parties. A dispatcher explained how he or she may have two calls that are similar but never have two calls that are alike. Dispatchers acknowledge that what may work for one reporting party may not work for the next. Dispatchers talk about "hot calls," riveting calls where the caller is emotional, and the dispatcher must manage the reporting party's emotions (Guy et al., 2015, p. 186).

Each of these components allows the dispatcher to be good at what he or she does, but at what price? Prior research indicates that emotional suppression exacerbates distress and reduces cognitive performance and self-control (Low, Overall, Hammond, & Girme, 2017). The very thing that allows the dispatcher to be good at his or her job and to be able to continue to work one incident after another is the very thing that can cause for a reduction in intellectual reasoning and self-discipline. Emotional labor can be just as exhausting as physical labor. The highs and lows that the dispatcher feels each work day can be mentally draining; nevertheless, it is the job of the dispatcher.

In the book, *The Managed Heart, Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Hochschild (2012) sought to reveal, provide an understanding, and educate the reader with her beliefs in the definition of emotional labor. As a young juvenile, Hochschild became fascinated learning about individuals and how they managed their emotions, gestures, and characteristics. Hochschild became captivated by hearing stories from her parents who were involved in the U.S. Foreign Services as they spoke and interpreted the various gestures of the different individuals they associated with. Hochschild's passion for understanding the managed emotions that individuals displayed continued to grow all through her college years and beyond. She explained how she found herself indebted to Erving Goffman for his keen sense of how individuals try to control their appearance even while they unconsciously observe rules about how they ought to appear to others (Hochschild, 2012). Goffman's beliefs assisted Hochschild to continue her research in observing how an individual acts on feelings, stops acting on feelings, or even stops feeling all together. This was the beginning of Hochschild's concept of emotional labor: a regulation of emotions working people perform as part of their job.

Hochschild (2012) provided her interpretation of emotional labor. Her research was based upon observing public servants within different occupations. She had a clearer outlook and appreciation for those who put on a smile for the job they were hired to do. Hochschild provided a breakdown of emotional labor into three relevant discourses. The first discourse is *labor*. Hochschild discussed how physical or labored jobs have changed over the years. She said, “Complex tasks in which a craftsman used to take pride are divided into simpler, more repetitive segments, each more boring and less well paid than the original job” (Hochschild, 2012, p. 10). Labor will always be work; however, as society changes, the need for specific jobs will change. Jobs appear to becoming more emotional, communicative, and computerized rather than physically skilled. Therefore, individuals need to be able to know how to speak to others in a civil and professional manner. Public servants need to be trained in responding rather than reacting. The public servant needs to think logically and respond by following his or her department’s policy and procedures rather than reacting by coming across as defensive and following his or her emotions.

The second discourse is *display*. Display is based on the individual who exhibits his or her feelings. Organizations want their employees to show a display of approachability and willingness to help as well as providing good customer service. Since organizations require a display of emotions, Hochschild (2012) believed that these emotions have an economic value. This value can be transformed into wages, tips, and salaries. No matter if the job is face to face or over the phone, employees are representing the organization. As dispatchers speak to the public and the field units, they need to maintain professionalism and recognize the tone of their voice. The dispatcher’s

tone can set the disposition of how the reporting party or field unit responds. The dispatcher needs to remember not to react in an unprofessional way to a reporting party or field unit even if he or she feels he or she is being mistreated. The mindset of the dispatcher should rely on the training he or she receives, which may help in staying focused. Because the dispatcher is a representative of his or her department, he or she should remain professional and not allow his or her feelings to get in the way.

Hochschild's (2012) third discourse, *emotion*, is the most complex to explain. In short, emotions are feelings that individuals sense. Emotions stem from an individual's feelings of instinct originating by his or her circumstances, temperament, or relationship with others. Once an individual can understand that emotions are based on feelings, the individual needs to learn to control these feelings.

In addition to the three discourses, labor, display, and emotion, Hochschild (2012) provided two techniques that employees demonstrate while working in an emotionally laboring job. The first technique, *surface acting*, is where employees tend to disguise their own feelings with an expression that would please the public and their employer. The gestures from an individual's appearance is on exhibit in surface acting. The body is the main instrument on display rather than the use of the soul. Surface acting would be expressing an emotion without feeling the emotion. Putting on an appearance or hiding a genuine emotion as one works with the public would be considered as surface acting. Even though dispatchers do not have face-to-face contact with the public or the field units, their voice inflection if not careful can come across as rude, sarcastic, and, therefore, unprofessional. Biased feelings from the dispatcher are unethical and go

against any department's mission statement. The dispatcher must separate his or her personal feelings from those of what the reporting party is advising.

The second technique, *deep acting*, is where an employee works on altering his or her feelings to give the impression of a more genuine performance as he or she works with the public. Deep acting is a form of individuals measuring how they can easily express the right emotion and feel those emotions when necessary for the job. An employee who can display deep acting has his or her feelings in line and does not show observable expressions following his or her emotions. Creating a barrier to block out the situation allows for an individual to hide behind his or her feelings. In order for a dispatcher to survive in the chosen career, deep acting provides a shield, and it allows the dispatcher to block out all of the horrible incidents that he or she is exposed to.

Hochschild (2012) mentioned that "we must dwell on what it is that we want to feel and on what we must do to induce the feeling" (p. 47). Surface acting does indeed lead to increased strain, while deep acting leads to enhanced job performance (Hülshager, Lang, & Maier, 2010). Although job performance is increased in deep acting, one may need to think about the cost to the employee. These acting techniques are used to get the public servant through a difficult day, allowing him or her to be a good representative of the department he or she works for. Emotional labor poses a challenge to a person's sense of self and losing who he or she truly is .

Hochschild (2012) reached out to various theorists to provide a wide range of definitions about their beliefs on emotion. These theorists provided two models of emotions. The first model, *organismic model*, comes from the works of Charles Darwin, William James, and Sigmund Freud. In the organismic model, social factors merely

“trigger” biological reactions and help steer the expression of these reactions into customary channels. Darwin’s theory of emotion is instinctual theory of gesture. He believed there was no emotion without an expression of gesture (Hochschild, 2012). As individuals felt a specific way, they would show it by the facial expression they exhibited. Freud related emotion to affect, indicating that affect is tension and anxiety is the manifestation of instinct (Hochschild, 2012). Following this belief, one would have to believe that affect is stress. Stress causes anxiety, which in turn causes tension. The third theorist, James related emotion as being the brain’s conscious reaction to instinctual visceral changes. James believed that different emotions are accompanied by different bodily states (Hochschild, 2012). James’s theory is one step further than Darwin’s theory on facial expressions. James’s theory believes that as one becomes sad, he or she cries, and as one gets physically hurt, he or she feels pain. Emotions are a full mind, body, and soul. Each of these theorists provided a different aspect of what emotion is, yet their beliefs are very similar. Each definition is unique and allows the reader to gain a good understanding of what emotion is.

The second model, *interactional model*, comes from John Dewey, Hans Gerth, C. Wright Mills, and Erving Goffman (Hochschild, 2012). The interactional model presupposes biology but adds more points to social entry: social factors enter not simply before and after but interactively during the experience of emotion (Hochschild, 2012). Interactional model is the thoughts and feelings one goes through during the time of an emotional experience. Dewey et al. distinguished three aspects of emotion: gesture (or behavior sign), conscious experience, and physiological process (Hochschild, 2012). Of the three emotions, the theorists focused most on gesture, however, not in the same frame

as Darwin. Interactional model is not only about the facial gestures as Darwin theorized, but it is also about the behavioral body language sign one makes when he or she is facing an emotional situation (Hochschild, 2012). It is about defining the way the individual appears to feel or the perception he or she is giving from body gestures. Conscious experience is being aware and mindful of what one does. The physiological process is that of oneself, the person's inner self, and how he or she performs as an individual. The interactional model appears to be more of a physical reaction to emotion. Because each of these theorists has his or her own version of emotions, this proves how subjective the topic of emotion can be. Hochschild (2012) used each of the theorists' insights on emotion to develop her own knowledge and explanation of emotional labor.

Grandey and Melloy (2017) wrote an article, "The State of the Heart: Emotional Labor as Emotional Regulation Reviewed and Revised," which is a revised version of a previous article that was published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* in 2000 (Grandey, 2000). The original article was based upon a combination of theories from sociologist Arlie Hochschild's (1983) principles in emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) and Gross's (1998a) emotion regulation model. Grandey and Melloy's (2017) article referred to emotional labor as emotional regulation as they have similar characteristics. Hochschild's (1983) definition of emotional labor was seen as the effort performed by the employee rather than the work role requirements or expressive displays and both surface acting and deep acting; whereas, emotional regulation is defined as the process by which an individual influences his or her own emotions, how he or she expresses those emotions, and how he or she experiences the emotion. A revised model is presented and updated with multilevel and dynamic ways of thinking about managing

emotional expressions as part of one's job (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). An explanation of surface acting and deep acting is provided. Surface acting is where employees mask their own feelings and "paste on" the expected expressions, thus experiencing what Hochschild (2012) termed as emotive dissonance between feelings and expressions. Deep acting is where employees work to change feelings to appear more genuine in the performance but perhaps losing their true feelings in the process. Hochschild argued that both approaches treat emotions as a commodity and alienate the worker from his or her emotions. Emotional regulation was defined by Gross (1998b) as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (p. 275). Gross suggested that there are two main types of emotional regulation that occur at separate points following exposure to a stimulus: antecedent focused and response focused. These two exposures were denoted in an attempt to transform or adjust felt emotions, or to modify or suppress expressions. The model provided a comprehensive road map and the foundation to take emotional labor exploration in diverse directions than formerly done. In reviewing the emotional labor model of 2000, it provides three basic sections: situational cues, emotional regulation process, and long-term consequences. The revised model provides three sections; however, these sections are based on three different topics: work context level, person level, and event level. As in any study, the research had some limitations. It was encouraged that future research be conducted using the model provided for a variety of ways in researching emotional labor. To conclude the article, the psychological framework and evidence led researchers to focus on how employees actively regulate

their emotions in response to the increasingly interpersonal nature of the work(Grandey & Melloy, 2017).

Hülshager et al.'s (2010) study, "Emotional Labor, Strain, and Performance: Testing Reciprocal Relationships in a Longitudinal Panel Study," consisted of a sample of 151 teachers in testing the direction of effects in a two-wave longitudinal panel. The study provided information from Grandey's (2000) model. According to the integrated model proposed by Grandey, the process of managing feelings and emotional expressions is the core of emotional labor because it addresses the way employees deal with emotional job requirements. The study explored Hochschild's (2012) surface acting and deep acting. While surface acting is limited to the management of observable expressions, deep acting involves the intended management of core feelings, which in turn leads to a variation of the observable expression. Results reveal that the emotional labor strategy of surface acting led to increases in subsequent strain while deep acting led to increases in job performance. Although deep acting led to an increase in job performance, research shows that deep acting is an effortful regulatory process that depletes mental resources and may thereby lead to exhaustion.

The goal of this present study was to investigate how surface and deep acting casually relate to strain and performance. These findings stand counter to Hochschild's (1983) early assertion that "emotional labor in general harms the employee while helping the organization" (p. 516). Future research is suggested to direct attention to those potential mediating mechanisms, emotional intelligence worth considering, and a thorough understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the emotional labor-performance relationship. The final suggestion is to draw additional attention to the

antecedents of surface acting and deep acting. Limitations include the sample used in the study were all trainee teachers, and job performance records for the trainees were not provided. In conclusion, the study results were one step further in drawing inferences about casual relationships underlying the emotional labor process. The job of the dispatcher is emotionally laboring, and providing an understanding on how to cope and deal with the stressors of the job may assist in alleviating these emotions.

Summary

In summary, dispatchers are the first of the first responders. They need to be mentally alert and emotionally stable to do the job they are required to do. As unique as the job of a dispatcher is, he or she must be able to monitor several computer displays, properly give directions and instructions to the reporting party and the field units, be able to elicit important information from the reporting parties and relay it to the field unit in a timely manner, and handle all this while the reporting party is hysterical, upset, or agitated. Dispatchers have a commitment to the public and field units they serve. They need to be able to handle whatever situation may arise. The dispatcher is trained in serving the public and the field units during critical incidents, yet many do not know how to care for him or herself. The dispatcher disregards his or her own feelings to do the job that he or she is trained to do, which is to help the public and the field units.

The literature provided was intended to inform and present a clear vision for the reader about emergency dispatch. The first component introduced the culture of the dispatch center. The culture of dispatch informs one about how independent, private, and stoic dispatchers appear to be. Williams (2017) explained how first responders are conditioned not to talk about their feelings after a bad call or tragic event because it

shows signs of weakness. Dispatchers shield themselves by emotional suppression, emotional mask, emotional armor, and emotional Teflon. Each definition has been explained in the literature (Guy et al., 2015). However, by informing dispatchers of each of these definitions and providing an understanding that they can reach out to a peer to share their experience instead of suppressing their emotions after a critical incident may assist them in their career journey as a dispatcher. Allowing the dispatchers to know that they can share their experiences in a safe environment by reaching out to a peer who is willing to listen may be beneficial. Instilling this belief among dispatchers within the dispatch center would be the first steps in changing the culture.

The second component defined a peer supporter and a peer support organization. As the literature provided a clear understanding, the hope of the researcher was for the reader to realize the importance of peer support. Peer support is meant to help, heal, and restore those who work together for the department. The stresses of the job can be shared and dealt with together with those coworkers who are willing to support another. Reaching out to a peer is beneficial for both the peer and the peer supporter. As a peer supporter, he or she too may need a way to heal. One peer supporter expressed,

As I journey through life with others, I have experienced the value of being a peer. Receiving hugs, thank you, notes, phone calls, reciprocal concerns, etc. is the evidence peer support has value. Learning that a marriage was restored, hearing the ability to forgive, seeing the person live with purpose are a few examples of making it to the other side of the mountain when it didn't seem possible. Then becoming true friends. (S. Diaz, personal communication, November 25, 2017)

As dispatchers go through this unique career, being able to help one another, whether it be work related or personal, can make this journey that much nicer. The expression of sincere caring for a peer is ultimately more meaningful to those struggling than competent technical practice (Marshall & Laorenza, 2018).

The third portion addressed within the literature was focused on burnout. Burnout has been found to be prevalent in several health care and helping professions, such as emergency workers (Cicognani, Pietrantonio, Palestini, & Prati, 2009). Although “emotional engagement motivates workers and produces job satisfaction, the requirement to express emotions they do not actually feel produces burnout” (Guy et al., 2015, p. 188). It is the job of the dispatchers to remain professional even as they answer calls from those who are upset, verbally abusive, and frustrated. The emotional labor of the dispatcher’s job helps achieve in the dispatcher a desired state of mind. This is done so the dispatcher can ascertain the information that is needed for the safety of both the emergency field unit and the public. The emergency dispatcher will nearly always state that he or she enjoys his or her job; however, he or she also explains that what comes with the job can be frustrating and at times exhausting. Maslach (2017) pointed out that burnout comes with some serious costs—personal, social, organizational, and economic. If employees are feeling burned out, it is important for departments to look for ways to help decrease burnout among them. Better training may bring about a lower incident of burnout (Guy et al., 2015). Training dispatchers on how to be resilient or how to better handle stress may be one way to improve the dispatcher’s disposition. Maslach established that some interventions can actually improve the social climate of such workplaces so that there is less burnout and absenteeism and more engagement and civil

working relationships. Although the interventions were not named, peer support could be one way to help with burnout.

The last section that was addressed was the theoretical framework of this dissertation based upon emotional labor. Emotional labor provides the dispatchers with an understanding of the job of a public servant. They must manage their feelings to create what is expected of them in the job they do. Not only is it the responsibility of the dispatcher to manage his or her feelings as he or she hears the screams and cries of the reporting party but also to help with the emotional state of the reporting party as he or she is going through a traumatic event. The dispatcher has the responsibility to retrieve information from the reporting party for the safety of the public and the emergency field unit. Guy et al. (2015) provided several components that addressed emotional labor. As these components are understood, the dispatcher can begin to relate and deal with the emotions and feelings that he or she may be going through. The intensity and criticalness of emergency dispatch work captures a level of complexity not found in other service jobs (Guy et al., 2015). Hochschild's (2012) literature provided an additional viewpoint of emotional labor: surface acting and deep acting. The literature stated that the emotional labor strategy of surface acting led to an increase in subsequent strain, and deep acting is an effortful regulatory process that depletes mental resources that lead to exhaustion (Hulsheger et al., 2010). Hochschild (2012) told about two different workers. The first was the worker who identified too wholeheartedly with the job and showed risk of burnout. This type of worker offers warm personable service to his or her clients. However, this worker would not be good at depersonalizing inappropriate personal behavior toward him or herself making him or her susceptible to burnout. The second

worker that Hochschild presented is the worker who distinguishes his or her job duties as one who needs to have the capacity to act. Although the second worker is less susceptible than the first worker in suffering stress and burnout, the second worker is more likely to become cynical of his or her job. Hakanen and Bakker (2017) mentioned that cynicism is a chronic syndrome that leads to burnout.

As stated previously, the purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness in existing peer support programs and their connection, if there is one, in addressing burnout among the emergency dispatchers. The Office of Management and Budget classifies dispatchers as clerical (Mann, 2016). Yet, dispatchers do not work the 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. hours, Monday–Friday work schedule, nor are they off on weekends or holidays. The only individuals who can understand and relate to the job of the emergency dispatcher is the emergency dispatcher. Dispatchers answer multiple traumatic calls and handle stressful radio incidents without decompression time to process the associated feelings and somatic responses. This traumatic exposure alone sets the job of the public safety dispatcher apart from clerical or administrative occupations (Mann, 2016).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

The intention of the researcher was to conduct a quantitative research study, to locate a connection, if there was one, between a peer support program and the perceived effectiveness and impact it has in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers. Creswell (2014) explained that “quantitative research” is an approach for “testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables” (p. 4). Therefore, the researcher conducted a nonexperimental, quantitative research study, which examines the relationship between the independent variable (peer support) and the dependent variable (burnout). The chapter includes the purpose of the study, research design, research questions, population and sample size, instrument used, and data collection. The chapter concludes with limitations and threats to validity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness in existing peer support programs and their connection, if there is one, in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers.

Peer support programs are defined in a variety of ways dependent upon who is asked. In general, peer support has been defined by the fact that people who have like experiences can better relate and can consequently offer more authentic empathy and validation (Mead & MacNeil, 2004). Burnout is characterized by an inability to disengage (escape) from the work, by an overwhelming grinding pressure, a callousness, an inability to maintain a professional perspective, a sense of hopelessness, apathy, despondency, and a lack of trust (Guy et al., 2015). Historically, burnout runs high among public servants. As emergency dispatchers are public servants and have a

constant connection with the public, who generally call during stressful times, it can be a battle to keep the dispatcher from becoming overwhelmed. Hearing the cries and screams from the public, constantly de-escalating a situation, and controlling both the reporting party and his or her emotions can become demanding. If the dispatcher is unable to adequately pacify the reporting party to a point where the individual can communicate important information, the dispatcher will be ineffective. The 911 dispatchers experience stress, both cumulative and traumatic, as a result of their work (Perin, 2016). Stress is known to lead to burnout if not dealt with properly. Hakanen and Bakker (2017) explained how burnout is a response to extended stressors at work and is defined as an enduring syndrome, which includes exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. Perin (2016) commented that the dispatcher experiences physical, psychological, and emotional consequences because of the job he or she does. There may be times when the dispatcher will need to reach out for assistance and feel comforted by a peer who knows what he or she may be feeling and going through, as the peer may have had the same experiences since working in the same realm of work. Therefore, the peer supporter can assist in listening to the coworker, providing practical advice dependent upon the situation, or referring the coworker to a professional. Solomon (2004) hypothesized that peer support was effective through processes such as social and emotional support, experiential or reciprocal learning, social learning (e.g., role modeling), and mechanisms related to social comparison theory (e.g., the sense of normalcy provided by sharing with individuals who have had similar experiences, “upward comparison” and the offer of hope and optimism, “downward comparison” and the recognition that things could be worse). A peer support program is really a statement

that an agency values its employees' psychological health, and that it wants to create a program that supports their psychological well-being (Perin, 2016). If it is determined that peer support programs within 911 emergency dispatch centers produce positive outcomes in addressing burnout, it would be feasible for agencies to inquire about a program or better yet about implementing peer support across the nation.

Research Methodology

The methodology the researcher used is a nonexperimental, quantitative research design. According to Creswell (2009), quantitative research allows the researcher to ask specific questions, collect numeric data, analyze data using statistics, and conduct an unbiased inquiry in an objective manner. The researcher examined the relationship between variables using statistical analysis by way of a quantitative research design. The researcher surveyed emergency dispatchers in measuring their level of burnout and to gain an insight into their perception of an effective peer support program that the participants have at their departments. Data collection was done by utilizing two surveys (A & B) that were sent to 911 emergency dispatchers with the assistance of SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). The researcher sent an invitation to participate that explained the survey and asked for individual participation. The researcher reached out to individuals that she had a rapport with and who could assist in sending the surveys to supervisors and dispatchers who fit the criteria. The individuals contacted were people the researcher had met over her 21-year career of being a dispatcher. Instrument A began by introducing the survey, providing an informed consent for participants to either agree or disagree to take the survey, asking questions regarding the criteria required, and collecting demographical data. An ordinal

measurement of questions followed within the same survey. These questions collected data that provided a placement order of rank. Immediately after participants finished Instrument A, they participated in taking Instrument B. Instrument B collected ordinal measurement of data. Each instrument was measured separately because each instrument had a different purpose. Instrument A focused on burnout, and Instrument B provided information regarding peer support programs. All intentions were to explore a connection between peer support, if there was one, in addressing burnout among the emergency dispatchers.

Research Questions

The intention of the researcher was to find a connection, if there was one, between a peer support program and the impact it has in addressing burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. To answer the researcher's questions, the study followed a quantitative research design. The quantitative research design involves the processes of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study (Creswell, 2014). The first portion of the survey helped gauge burnout among the participants. The second portion inquired about the participants' perceived opinion of their department's peer support program, along with their perceived opinion of specific components that create an effective peer support program. The researcher's intentions were to be able to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of emotional exhaustion?
2. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of depersonalization?

3. To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of personal accomplishment?

Participants

The chosen population for this study was 911 emergency dispatchers within the State of California. The population is the total set of subjects of interest in a study (Agresti & Finlay, 2014). The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) reported that there were 98,600 dispatcher jobs in 2016 in the United States. However, because of the restricted timeframe, the researcher narrowed down her research population of 911 emergency dispatchers to specific areas within the State of California. The Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that in 2017, California had the second highest employment level of 911 emergency dispatchers, which was estimated at about 6,600. As the population of 6,600 was still a large amount, the researcher decided to continue to narrow down her study population by focusing on three counties within California. The researcher began her search by selecting five large counties in California by utilizing the California Demographics by Cubit website (2017). The selection was reduced to three counties because two of the counties did not meet the standards of the researcher's criterion. The criterion determined by the researcher was for the participant to be a full-time dispatchers who had been trained on the public safety answering point (PSAP) and radio dispatching. The counties were listed and directed as County 1, County 2, and County 3. The researcher coded each county to keep the counties' identities confidential. The identities of each county were put on a spread sheet with the listed code names retained by the researcher who has the spread sheet password protected.

The sample is the subset of the population for which the study collects data (Agresti & Finley, 2014). Because the researcher chose the three largest populated counties within California, it reduced her sample size to approximately 350 emergency dispatchers. Because of the time constraints of the researcher, the sample of 350 was a plausible number of dispatchers with whom to work. County 1 had 125 dispatchers, County 2 had 50 dispatchers, and County 3 had 175 dispatchers. The sample was limited to full-time dispatchers who had been trained to work both the radio position and the phone position (not necessarily at the same time). This established that all participants had the same experience in handling both the phone and radio positions and worked a minimum of 40 hours a week. The researcher was optimistic that the participants would be truthful when consenting to participate. Providing consistency among the participants showed reliability. Participants varied in ethnicity, age, gender, and their years of experience and service in dispatching. There were no limitations on gender, age, or race, nor did it affect this study. An invitation to participate, along with a web link that participants could access to administer the survey, was sent via e-mail to individuals the researcher had met over her 21-year career as a dispatcher. The individuals were instructed to send the invitation to participate and web link to supervisors and line-level dispatchers who met the criteria: (a) I am a full-time employee who works a minimum of 40 hours, and (b) I am trained to work both the PSAP and radio positions. Participants were promised anonymity. They were also advised that participating in the survey was voluntary and they would not be compensated. The benefits of these data will provide an insight into peer support programs and burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers.

Instrumentation

This quantitative research study utilized two separate instruments within one survey. The researcher employed SurveyMonkey software, which provided a program that assisted the researcher in creating, directing, and forming questionnaires and surveys. The researcher began by creating an invitation to participate (Appendix A) that was the first form of contact with the organizations and personal contacts of the researcher. A consent form (Appendix B) was created and presented within the survey prior to participants taking the survey. The consent form is a waiver allowing participants to decline or rescind participation at any time. Sending the survey through a third party such as SurveyMonkey provided the participants anonymity, as they could fill out the questionnaire directly through the website. To maintain confidentiality, SurveyMonkey was programmed to exclude names and e-mail addresses of all participants. SurveyMonkey (n.d.) provided a total anonymity function, which blocked even the researcher from viewing the identity of the participants. Participants were informed that all involvement was anonymous, and there would be no compensation awarded for the participant's time in filling out the survey. Because of the complexity of shift work for the dispatchers and the time restraint that the researcher was under, a web-based survey was the best instrument to be utilized by the researcher. This allowed for flexibility for the dispatchers to participate. The job of the dispatcher is a 24/7 job; therefore, his or her schedule varies.

Instrument A is an intact survey and has been utilized for many years. The questions in Instrument A were developed by American social psychologist and professor, Christina Maslach (2016); therefore, it is considered an intact survey. She is

best known as one of the pioneering researchers on job burnout and the author of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Human Services Survey (MBI–HSS), which is the most widely used research measure in the burnout field (Maslach, 2016). For this reason, the MBI–HSS provided validity to this dissertation. Participants began by answering questions using a nominal scale. Instrument A started with three questions (1-3) that assisted the researcher in determining whether the participants were eligible to participate per the researcher’s criteria. Questions 4-6 were demographic questions and were optional for participants to answer. Although the demographic questions were not measured in any way or determined the outcome of this study, the researcher decided it was appropriate to include them because they may be useful in a future research. Participants continued the survey utilizing a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*), 2 (*a few times a year or less*), 3 (*once a month or less*), 4 (*a few times a month*), 5 (*once a week*), 6 (*a few times a week*), to 7 (*every day*) that formed an ordinal scale of answers. An ordinal scale consists of categorical scales having a natural ordering of value (Agresti & Finlay, 2014). Because of the copyright restrictions, the researcher was not able to publish the actual MBI–HSS or any of the specific questions; however, Appendix C provides the licensing purchase document with sample items of Instrument A.

The MBI–HSS includes three components of burnout: (a) emotional exhaustion, which measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work, (b) depersonalization, which measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one’s service, care treatment, or instruction, and (c) personal accomplishment, which measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in

one's work (Maslach, 2017). The MBI–HSS was created to measure burnout of employees who work with the public.

Instrument B (Appendix D) was an original instrument created by the researcher. Instrument B was also measured in an ordinal value among the questions provided and elicited the perceptions, beliefs, experiences, and feelings of the participant on the topic of peer support and its components. Instrument B consisted of 13 questions; the first question—*are you aware that your agency has a peer support program?*—was a dichotomous question (yes and no). Questions 30-31 used a 4-point Likert scale: 1 (*never*), 2 (*often*), 3 (*always*), and 4 (*I was not aware I had a peer support program*) and asked whether participants used their peer support program, and did they find a peer support program helpful in the job they do. Questions 32-34 used a 3-point Likert scale: 1 (*never*), 2 (*often*), and 3 (*always*) that addressed participants' perception of a peer support program in alleviating burnout. Questions 35-41 used a 3-point Likert scale: 1 (*not at all effective*), 2 (*moderately effective*), and 3 (*extremely effective*) and focused on the participants' perception of measuring the effectiveness of specific components within a peer support program. Prior to the researcher creating the questions, she explored several peer support policies. Those policies were located on the Internet from law enforcement agencies throughout the nation as well as locating policies on the California Peer Support Association (CPSA) website. The researcher located several qualities that each of the programs provided. Those qualities were used in the researcher's questions (35-41) for participants to rate on their effectiveness. The researcher had personal knowledge that each of the participating agencies did have a peer support program within their department because the researcher located those qualities in their agency's policies.

In previous chapters, the researcher explained that dispatchers in California are Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certified, and therefore, are mandated to receive 120 hours of training. Four of the 120 hours of training are focused on wellness management, which introduces peer support as a tool that may be utilized within departments. Therefore, dispatchers are provided with information regarding a peer support program. It is unknown if all departments have a peer support program or how it is utilized, how well it is perceived, and how well it is viewed by the dispatchers. Instrument A and Instrument B were within the same survey. Participants were not informed of the separation of the two instruments because they appeared to be one survey. The survey was provided to the participants allowing no break between instruments. The format of the survey appeared to be one survey with up to 41 questions. This was to discourage participants from leaving the survey too soon. The researcher was aware that Instrument B had not been tested and may be questioned on its validity. However, after thoughtful consideration, it was best not to pilot test Instrument B due to the chance of contamination of the whole study. Law enforcement, which includes dispatch, is known as a tight-knit second family, and there could be a chance that someone within the pilot test could mention something about the researcher's sample that could taint or contaminate the study.

The intent of these surveys was to assist the researcher in evaluating the level of burnout dispatchers may be dealing with (Instrument A) and provide the researcher with the dispatcher's perception of his or her peer support program as well as specific components that make a peer support program (Instrument B). The researcher's objective was to be able to answer the research questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher utilized her career service of 21 years as a dispatcher to assist her in gaining her sample. Over those years, the researcher created relationships and kept in contact with individuals within the dispatch field. These individuals assisted the researcher in implementing the surveys to send to participants who fit the researcher's criteria. The researcher first disbursed the invitation to participate, which introduced the study and had an attached web link for the participants to take the surveys. The web link directed the participants to the SurveyMonkey's website, which displayed the survey and assisted the researcher in housing the data. A consent form was presented prior to the participants taking the survey. The participants were selected based on a purposeful sampling of 911 emergency dispatchers who worked full time and who were trained as 911 call takers (PSAP) and radio dispatchers. The electronic informed consent waiver allowed dispatchers the ability to agree to participate or withdraw at any time. Dispatchers were advised that the survey was voluntary and confidential. SurveyMonkey kept track of collecting the data and calculating the results through its "text analysis" function. SurveyMonkey provided custom charts and graphs separating the answers for the researcher.

Cronbach's alpha testing was utilized to assist the researcher as a measure of scale reliability. The Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency; it measures how closely related a set of items is as a group. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient of reliability or consistency testing. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to provide reliability of the survey being taken by participants. Once reliability was determined, the researcher then utilized a Pearson correlation significant 2-tailed test. The researcher first separated

the questions within Instrument A into emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The researcher then separated the questions within Instrument B. Three of the questions were focused on the participants' perception based on whether a peer support program can assist in alleviating burnout. The second set of questions was focused on the participants' perception of measuring the effectiveness of specific components within a peer support program. The 2-tailed test provided a level of positive or negative correlation between Instrument A and Instrument B.

SurveyMonkey provided confidentiality for the participants and collected the statistics for the research study. Once a participant opened the survey, whether he or she participated or decided to decline, the data were still collected, providing the researcher a documented number of participants who declined. A benefit for the participant was the promise of total anonymity, where both the researcher and the participant's agency did not know who participated in the survey. Participants were advised that the survey needed to be done within a 30-day period from the date that was noted in the invitation to participate. This allotted time was sufficient considering it should take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete both surveys. Participants were aware of this time frame in the invitation to participate. Reminder e-mails were sent to participants every 7 days prior to the online survey closing. If the researcher did not receive a sufficient amount of returned surveys within the allotted time frame, the researcher was able to extend the allotted time frame for an additional 7 days.

Data Cleaning Procedures

Prior to receiving, gathering, and processing the data, the researcher provided a criterion that the data needed to submit to. According to Frankfort- Nachmias and

Nachmias (2008), “Data cleaning is the proofreading of the data to catch any errors and inconsistent codes” (p. 314). SurveyMonkey assisted the researcher in the data cleaning process. However, the researcher needed to provide SurveyMonkey with specific criteria to follow. The researcher utilized two separate instruments and requested demographics from the participants, because the researcher wanted to clarify what was acceptable during the data cleaning process. SurveyMonkey removed all direct and indirect personal information of the participants as well as the agency of the participant. The researcher neither dismissed nor canceled the input from a participant if he or she did not complete the demographic section of the survey because these questions were optional. Another reason was that the research was not based on any of the demographic inquiries nor would it change the outcome of the analyzed data. Incomplete or missing information in answering the two criteria questions (1. I am a full-time employee who works a minimum of 40 hours, and 2. Are you trained to work both the PSAP and radio positions) resulted in the dismissal of the individual as a participant). Each instrument in the survey is independent of the other. Therefore, as long as each section was completed, the survey would be accepted. Each instrument was measured independently, which assisted in analyzing the data distinctly.

Limitations

The researcher was aware of potential limitations. One potential limitation of this study was a lack of participation. The researcher contacted individuals who she had met over the last 20 years of her career in order for them to disburse the invitation to participate and web link. The individual disbursing the invitation to participate was a key factor for the researcher. Depending upon the individual’s participation, how he or she

was perceived by coworkers, and the information he or she provided to participants may have limited participants. Another limitation was the lack of willingness to take the time in filling out the survey questions. Without understanding or caring about the importance of the survey, individuals may not have been willing to participate. The third limitation was from those who did participate and did not provide an honest and thoroughly thought out answer to each of the survey questions. Not taking the survey seriously would cause inaccurate scoring. The researcher was aware of these potential limitations and willing to expand her search for participants in other counties if she did not receive enough survey returns. The hope of the researcher was that those who participated would encourage their coworkers to take the time to take the survey in somewhat of a snowball sampling affect.

Summary

In summary, the study sought to examine the impact of a perceived peer support program in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers. Quantitative studies are intended to allow the researcher an opportunity to conduct objective research where findings can be extended to a larger population (Borrego, Douglas, & Amelink, 2009). Additionally, a quantitative research study was appropriate because it involved the collection of data to determine whether, and to what extent, an association existed between two quantifiable variables (Gay, 1992). Collecting quantitative information from the dispatchers allowed the researcher to recognize trends and patterns in the data. As dispatchers participated in completing the survey, their answers provided some insight into levels of burnout that they may or may not be feeling. By addressing burnout, one can increase his or her personal wellness and improve recipient satisfaction and quality of

care (Maslach, 2017). Instrument B allowed the researcher to gain an understanding about the participating agencies' take on their peer support programs. The information collected can benefit both the dispatcher and the agency.

Because the job of the dispatcher is known to be stressful, emotional labor comes with consequences. Providing the dispatcher ways to reach out for assistance through a peer support program or by forming a program that can assist his or her dispatch center may provide relief in burnout. Maslach (2017) mentioned that there is a recommendation to turn to other people for help in dealing with burnout.

Chapter 3 provided details on how the researcher planned to utilize a nonexperimental, quantitative research study. The chapter restated the purpose of the study, research methodology, research questions, participants, instruments that were utilized, data collection and data cleaning procedures, and limitations. Chapter 4 discusses and provides the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness in existing peer support programs and their connection, if there is one, in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers. The researcher's intention was first to identify whether the participating 911 emergency dispatchers were or were not feeling burnout. Second, the researcher wanted to accumulate qualities that could help create a peer support program that dispatchers would want to utilize and find valuable. The survey determined whether having a peer support program would help alleviate burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. It also provided both the researcher and reader an insight into the dispatcher's perception of qualities that could create a successful peer support program. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data collected from the 208 responses out of the 350 possible participants. The researcher continues to provide details of the data collection process, data coding and cleaning, the analysis of the data in relation to the research questions, and demographics, although it was not a requirement to participate.

Data Collection Process

The researcher utilized SurveyMonkey to collect the data for this dissertation. The researcher set up an account with SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey assisted the researcher in creating a survey, collecting data, providing graphs, and keeping the participants anonymous. The survey was open to participants for 30 days. Prior to the survey being sent out, the researcher had primary contact with three individuals. Each individual worked for one of the three participating counties. The primary contact was notified in advance and provided an explanation of what the researcher was requesting. The researcher requested the primary contact to send out the letter of participation to

supervisors and dispatchers within his or her departments. The total number of participants between the three agencies contacted was approximately 350, 911 emergency dispatchers. The researcher had intended to collect a return of a minimum 50% participation. The primary contact was aware of this goal and notified that a reminder letter would be sent out every 7 days after the letter of participation was sent to the primary contact. The letter of participation was sent to the primary contacts on November 20th, 2018. They were advised to forward the letters on receipt. Within 5 days, 87 participants completed the survey. The researcher sent a reminder e-mail to the primary contacts on November 27th, 2018. The reminder e-mail provided a more personalized explanation into the importance of receiving completed surveys. Each primary contact replied that they forwarded the reminder e-mail to the supervisors and dispatchers. This generated an additional 100 participants completing the survey. The last 2 weeks the survey was open, the researcher collected a total of 208 completed surveys. The survey closed on December 20th, 2018. The researcher's original goal was to collect, at minimum, 50% of completed surveys; the researcher surpassed that by 9%. The total completed surveys was 208, bringing the total to 59%.

Data Coding and Cleaning

The researcher was fully aware of the importance of coding her data. According to LeBlanc (2010), "The first step after collecting data and before analysis involves the coding of data into a form that can be read by statistical programs" (p. 3). Prior to collecting data, the researcher had already begun coding data. When the decision was made on which three counties would be participating, the researcher made sure to code each county. This was done to keep the anonymity of the departments. Each county was

represented and addressed as County 1, County 2, and County 3. Coding was done by the researcher to assist in organizing, labeling, and compiling data. It also allowed the researcher to summarize and synthesize what occurred within the data set (Bryman, 2016). Careful attention was taken by the researcher to ensure accuracy when coding was being inputted from the raw data that were collected from the survey. Each question from the Likert scale survey provided a value, which assisted the researcher to export to Excel for analysis.

The researcher originally had two requirements for participants to follow in order to take the survey. First, the participant needed to be a full-time 911 emergency dispatcher. Second, the participant needed to be trained in both public safety answering point (PSAP) and the radio position. Participants who did not meet requirements were not allowed to continue with the survey, but the researcher changed the requirements allowing participants who had been trained in either one or both to take the survey. The requirement of being a full-time 911 emergency dispatcher was still intact and a requirement to take the survey. The researcher's intention in making this change was to compare the difference and see if there was a significant variance in the results. As suspected, there was very little difference. Therefore, the researcher allowed all completed surveys to be accepted. As stated earlier in this study, data cleaning is the proofreading of the data to catch and correct errors and inconsistent codes (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). The following steps were utilized in cleaning the raw data:

1. The researcher's total number of participants provided from raw data: original $n = 208$.

2. The researcher removed the participants who did not meet the following criteria(s):
 - a. I am a full-time employee who works a minimum of 40 hours (see Figure 1).
 - i. original $n = 208$, yes $n = 206$, no $n = 2$, updated $n = 206$

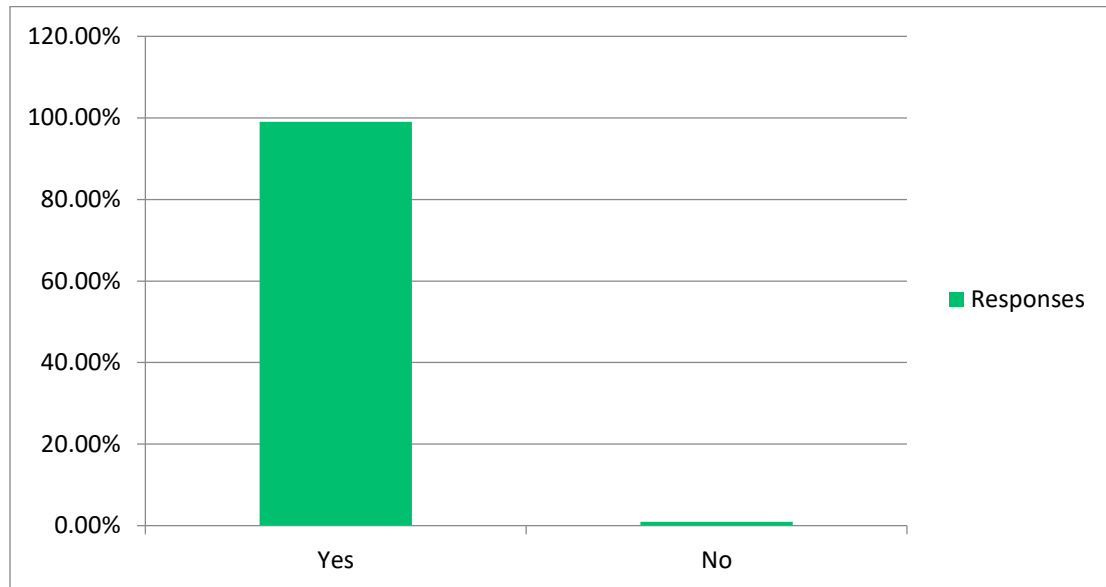


Figure 1. Full time employment.

The data for the participants who answered the following: “Are you trained to work both the PSAP and radio positions” were as follows: Original $n = 208$, Yes $n = 195$, No $n = 13$, Updated $n = 195$, which was a 6.25% difference (see Figure 2).

Reliability and Validity

The researcher measured the two variables of interest and then assessed the relationship between them. The survey began by first focusing on the dependent variable, peer support. SurveyMonkey provided a way for the researcher to house the collective data. SurveyMonkey collected the raw data, which were used to generate graphs.

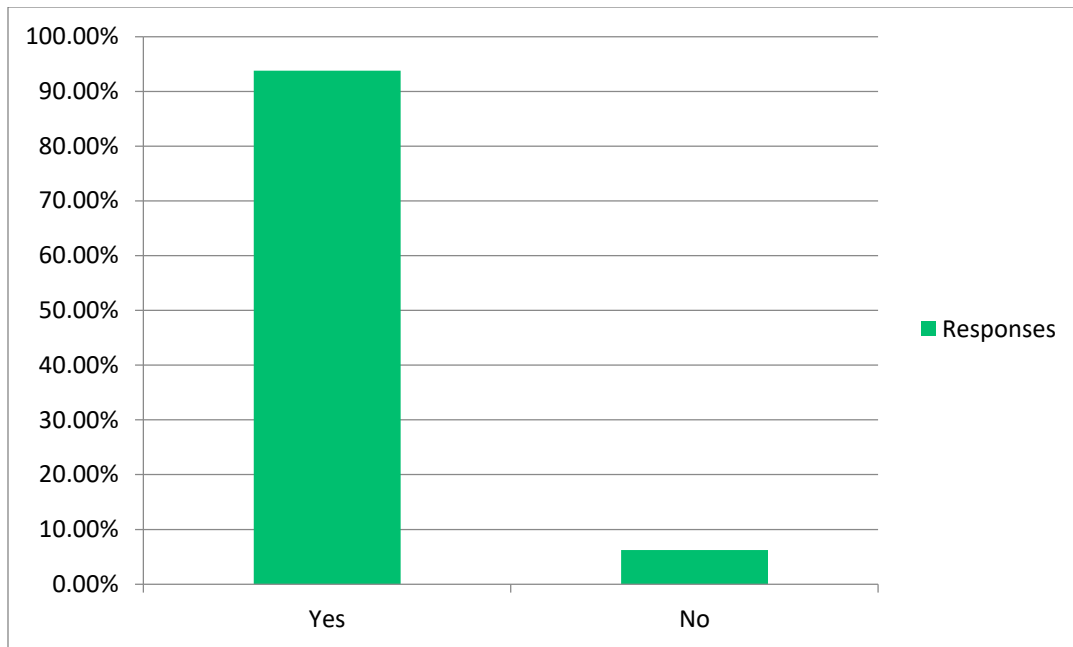


Figure 2. Employee status.

Since the survey was based on two separate instruments, the researcher was concerned about the reliability and validity of both instruments. Therefore, the reliability for each instrument was measured through Cronbach's alpha. Creswell (2014) stated that validity and reliability of scores on instruments lead up to meaningful interpretations of data. Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient of reliability or consistency and shows how closely related a set of items is as a group. The alpha measures the extent to which the individual items comprising the scale "hang together" (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). As the researcher utilized a Likert scale, the answers ranged from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*every day*). Cronbach's alpha separates each question and finds the correlation between each of the answers. This shows the relationship or consistency between the answers, providing a reliability of measurement. Once the researcher received the full results of the survey, the researcher separated the answers from the first instrument, the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Human Services Survey (MBI–HSS). The answers were separated by

questions based upon emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Each section was then exported into IBM SPSS Grad Pack version 25.0.

Data used from early samples that completed the original MBI estimated the internal reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951), which yielded estimates for the MBI-HSS scales as .90 for emotional exhaustion, .79 for depersonalization, and .71 for personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 2016). However, Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) indicated that a high alpha (.70 is an acceptable level) indicates that the items in the scale are "tightly connected" (p. 425). The first section explored for reliability was emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work (Maslach, 2017). There were 208 participants. However, two participants were excluded because they did not fit the criteria of the researcher. That left a remaining 206 valid participants. The alpha coefficient for the nine items was .91, suggesting that the items had a relatively high internal consistency.

The next section explored for reliability was depersonalization. Depersonalization measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction (Maslach, 2017). There were 208 participants; however, three participants were excluded. This included two who did not meet the researcher's criteria and one participant who did not fill in one or more questions within this portion of the survey. The alpha coefficient for the five items was .77, suggesting that the items had a relatively high internal consistency.

The last section explored within the MBI–HSS study for reliability was personal accomplishment. Personal accomplishment measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one’s work (Maslach, 2017). There were 208 participants; however, the scale showed that eight participants were excluded. This included the two who did not meet the researcher’s criteria and four who missed a question within this portion of the survey. The alpha coefficient for the eight items was .73, suggesting that the items had a relatively high internal consistency.

Once all three sections of the MBI–HSS instrument were tested for reliability, the researcher began testing Instrument B. Instrument B provides the reliability scale for the perceived effective qualities of a peer support program. Each question asked the participant to provide his or her perception of an effective quality. The researcher provided the qualities by searching several peer support programs and utilizing the qualities that were used in more than one peer support program. There were 208 participants; however, 205 were valid. The three excluded participants included two who did not meet the criteria and one who missed a question within this section. The alpha coefficient for the seven items was .90, suggesting that the items had a relatively high internal consistency. The questions and answers for the perceived qualities of a peer support program are attached in Appendix D. The qualities presented were located by the researcher. The researcher explored several peer support programs throughout California and made a list of the qualities and any repeated qualities that the researcher utilized. The purpose was to survey what participants felt about each of these qualities. Their perceived perception was that each of these qualities would create an effective peer support program.

The researcher was extremely satisfied with these results. Each section showed a satisfying score of the Cronbach's alpha acceptable level over .70. The measure of Cronbach's alpha needs to be high because it is believed to circuitously point to the degree to which a set of items measure an underlying commonality (Cortina, 1993; Cronbach, 1951). This indicates that the items in each section are being tightly connected. The researcher was particularly satisfied with the results of the perceived qualities of a peer support program as those questions were from an original instrument and because the researcher was concerned it would be questioned upon the reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

Once the reliability and validity were determined, the researcher continued her analysis by utilizing the SPSS program. The researcher employed a Pearson correlation coefficient, 2-tailed test (see Appendix E). Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) advised that one of the simplest statistics used to examine items is the bivariate Pearson correlation coefficient (Pearson's r), which indicates how closely linked each item is with other items or the entire scale. The Pearson's r is a statistical calculation that measures the strength of two variables, and/or it is a measurement of how dependent two variables are with one another. The Pearson's r is the covariance of the two variables divided by the product of the standard deviations (Frankfort- Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). The Pearson correlation section provided in Appendix E provides a strong linear relationship between the variables. The variables within this study have shown to be normally distributed and have a linear relationship. Correlation coefficient is understood to be on a straight line. It is between - 1 (perfectly negative) and + 1 (perfectly positive). If the

value of the correlation (r) is zero, there is no correlation between the variables: the significance (2-tailed) or level of significance. The researcher provided the results of the significance (2-tailed); however, she did not utilize the results for a hypothesis or a research question. Creswell (2014) mentioned that the t test is inconsistent because of variation in results associated with sample size. Small sample size as well as large sample size can provide false or invalid results. As the results of the Pearson correlation were reviewed, each variable showed a score of 1. This presented a perfectly positively related score because the variable was correlated with itself. The n within the box shows the number of participants.

The researcher kept each section of Instrument A separated: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. As a reminder, emotional exhaustion measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. Depersonalization measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction. Personal accomplishment measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work (Maslach, 2016). With those definitions in mind, it is fair to state that if emotional exhaustion and depersonalization have a positive score (+1), the participants are susceptible to a high range of burnout. Whereas, if participants score high (+ 1) in personal accomplishments, they would actually be at a low range of burnout. This is due to the questions and answers for personal accomplishment, as they work in somewhat of a reverse mode. The Likert scale provides answers from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*every day*). If a participant answers a personal accomplishment question with a 7, it would be a positive answer, whereas answering an emotional exhaustion question with a 7 would be considered a negative

response. Instrument A is based on the dependent variable, burnout. Instrument B is based on the independent variable, peer support. The researcher showed the strength of the linear relationship between each of the variables. This was done to also show how dependent the two variables are on each other. The independent variable, peer support, was divided between two sets of questions from Instrument B. The first set of independent variables was three questions based on the participants' perception of a peer support program in alleviating emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments. The three questions related to the MBI-HSS Instrument A. The participants answered these questions using a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 3 (*always*). The second independent variable that the researcher wanted to measure was questions specific to the qualities and components of a peer support program (Table 1 shows program components) and how effective they would or would not be in a program. The participants answered using a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all effective*) to 3 (*extremely effective*). The scale provides each variable measured against each other. This provides a strong linear relationship between the variables.

The following correlation coefficient matrix provides a view of the researcher's results (see Table 1). The correlation between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization is .624 ($n = 203$), indicating a strong positive association between the two variables and providing an r^2 value of 0.39. This was an expected finding because both are positively related to burnout. The correlation between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment is -.273 ($n = 199$), indicating a strong negative association.

Table 1

Pearson r Correlation—2-Tailed Test Results

Variables	Correlations				
	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal accomplishments	Perceived effectiveness of peer support programs	Perceived effectiveness of program components
Emotional exhaustion					
Pearson correlation	1				
Sig. (2-tailed)					
<i>n</i>	206				
Depersonalization					
Pearson correlation	.624**	1			
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
<i>n</i>	203	205			
Personal accomplishments					
Pearson correlation	-.273**	-.238**	1		
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001			
<i>n</i>	199	198	200		
Perceived effectiveness of peer support programs					
Pearson correlation	-.212**	-.218**	0.015	1	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.002	0.832		
<i>n</i>	203	202	197	205	
Perceived effectiveness of program components					
Pearson correlation	-.325**	-.175*	0.137	.610**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.013	0.055	0.000	
<i>n</i>	203	202	198	203	205

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Although there is a negative association (-.273) between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishments, the reverse mode of the answers needs to be taken into consideration. Because of the personal accomplishment being inversely related to emotional exhaustion, the outcome would actually be considered a strong association. The correlation between the perceived effectiveness of peer support programs are questions based upon the participants' perception of a peer support program in alleviating emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments. The Pearson correlation shows -.212 ($n = 199$), indicating a strong negative association. This section also provided a significance (2-tailed) value of .002 or .2%, thus indicating a statistically significant correlation between the two variables (burnout and peer support). The final variable reported perceived effectiveness of program components (qualities). The researcher created seven questions asking participants to rate the effectiveness of each quality presented within each question. These qualities were taken from a variety of peer support programs that the researcher explored and found in more than one program. The Pearson correlation between emotional exhaustion and the perceived effectiveness of program components shows -.325 ($n = 203$), indicating a strong negative association. There was a zero significant result for this section.

The next in the column is the correlation between depersonalization and personal accomplishments. The Pearson correlation shows -.238 ($n = 198$), indicating a strong negative association. This could be expected because of the reverse mode previously mentioned as well as the connection between the two variables. This section also provides a significance (2-tailed) that presents .001 or .1%, thus indicating a highly significant result. The next variable is the perceived effectiveness of a peer support

program in correlation with depersonalization. The Pearson correlation shows $-.218$ ($n = 202$), indicating a strong negative association. Results also showed a significance (2-tailed) $.002$ or $.2\%$, thus indicating a highly significant result. The last correlation between depersonalization was with the perceived effectiveness of program components. The Pearson correlation shows $-.175$ ($n = 202$), indicating a strong negative association. The results in this section also show a significance (2-tailed) $.013$ or 1.3% , indicating no statistically significant correlation between the two variables, which means, increases or decreases in one variable do not significantly relate to increases or decreases in the second.

In the final column indicating personal accomplishment and the perceived effectiveness of peer support programs, the Pearson correlation shows $.015$ ($n = 197$), indicating a weak relationship between the two variables with an r^2 value of 0.02 . Results show a significance (2-tailed) of $.832$ or 83.2% , indicating no statistically significant correlation between the two variables. These results may show a significant difference because of the reverse mode in the answers of personal accomplishment. The results between personal accomplishment and the perceived effectiveness of program components show a Pearson correlation of $.137$ ($n = 198$), indicating a weak relationship between the two variables with an r^2 value of 0.02 . The results show a significance (2-tailed) of $.55$ or 55.5% , indicating no significant correlation between the two variables.

The next two columns are based on the independent variable, peer support. The researcher provided the results of the independent variables versus the dependent variables. The last variable in the column that needs to be interpreted is perceived effectiveness of a peer support program and the perceived effectiveness of program

components, which provide a Pearson correlation of .61 ($n = 203$), indicating an average relationship between the two variables, with an r^2 value of 0.38. This could have been predicted because both variables are the same based on peer support.

Research Questions—Findings

The study sought to answer the following research questions. The data analysis provide insight to help answer them.

Research Question 1

To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of emotional exhaustion?

The researcher first separated the questions in Instrument A into three different categories: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The category based on emotional exhaustion included nine questions. Appendix C provides an example of questions in Instrument A. Because of the copyright agreement, the researcher was unable to provide a chart with all the questions in Instrument A. The second set of questions (three questions) related to the perception of a peer support program in alleviating emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments and is located in Instrument B. The third set of questions, also located in Instrument B, included seven questions. These questions relate to the qualities or components of a peer support program and the participant's perception of how effective they would or would not be to a program. The Pearson correlation coefficient conducted in measuring the answers from each category, which when the same variable is tested with itself, were determined to be positively related. The answers from each category were then measured to show the strength of the linear relationship between the categories.

The Pearson correlation between emotional exhaustion and the perceived effectiveness of a peer support program was $-.212$ ($n = 199$), indicating a strong negative association. The Pearson correlation between emotional exhaustion and the perceived effectiveness of program components (qualities) was $-.325$ ($n = 203$), indicating a strong negative association. The results show that the independent variable (peer support) shows a negative connection to the dependent variable (burnout). Therefore, in answering Research Question 1, there is a strong negative connection and no impact to emotional exhaustion in a participant utilizing a peer support program.

Research Question 2

To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of depersonalization?

Research Question 2 was tested by separating out the questions in Instrument A that were based on depersonalization, which included five questions. All five questions are related to depersonalization and are located in Instrument A. The researcher then compared the depersonalization questions to the questions related to the perception of a peer support program in alleviating emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments located in Instrument B. The researcher once again compared the depersonalization questions with the third set of questions related to the qualities or components of a peer support program and the participants' perception of how effective they would or would not be to a program. The Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted in measuring the answers from each category, which when the same variable was tested with itself was determined to be positively related. The answers from each category were then measured to show the strength of the linear relationship between the

categories. The Pearson correlation between depersonalization and the perceived effectiveness of a peer support program was -0.218 ($n = 202$), indicating a strong negative association. The Pearson correlation between depersonalization and the perceived effectiveness of program components (qualities) was -0.175 ($n = 202$), indicating a strong negative association. The results show that the independent variable (peer support) shows a negative connection to the dependent variable (burnout). Therefore, in answering Research Question 2, there was a strong negative connection and no impact to depersonalization in a participant utilizing a peer support program.

Research Question 3

To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of personal accomplishment?

Research Question 3 was tested by separating the questions in Instrument A and included eight questions. These questions are related to personal accomplishment. The researcher compared the results from the answers in personal accomplishment to the answers in the second set of questions that were based on the perception of a peer support program in alleviating emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments located in Instrument B. The researcher then compared the answers within personal accomplishment to the answers in the questions related to the qualities or components of a peer support program and the participants' perception of how effective they would or would not be to a program. The Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted to measure the answers from each category, which when the same variable is tested with itself is determined to be positively related. The answers from each category were measured to show the strength of the linear relationship between the categories.

The Pearson correlation between personal accomplishment and the perceived effectiveness of a peer support program was .015 ($n = 197$), indicating a weak relationship, with a r^2 value of 2.25. The Pearson correlation between emotional exhaustion and perceived effectiveness of program components (qualities) was .13 ($n = 198$), indicating a weak relationship, with a r^2 value of 0.02. The results show that the independent variable (peer support) shows a weak connection to the dependent variable (burnout). However, as previously stated, personal accomplishment was going to provide an opposite finding due to the questions. Although the results show a weak relationship between variables, Research Question 3 had to be answered because there is no impact to personal accomplishment in a participant utilizing a peer support program.

As the results proved that there is not a correlation between having a peer support program in addressing burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers, the findings did show a strong positive association between each of the three MBI–HSS variables, which indicates that the 911 emergency dispatchers have a high level of burnout. It is not surprising that the dispatchers do not realize the need for a peer support program as they are overwhelmed in the job they are doing. The following section provides an insight into the questions and answers of Instrument B based on peer support.

In Question 30, 96% of dispatchers acknowledged that they were aware that their agency has a peer support program. However, in Question 31, less than 16% of the dispatchers said they utilized the program. In Question 32, over 50% of the dispatchers agreed that a peer support program would “never” be helpful in their job duties. When asked, how often a peer support program would help alleviate emotional exhaustion (tiredness, fatigue) from their work day, over 50% advised never. When asked how often

a peer support program would help from being cynical (skeptical, sarcastic) in the way they view things, 49% advised never. The way the dispatchers answered these questions shows how clear the dispatchers were about a peer support program. However, when asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the quality of confidentiality and a safe place to talk, 78% said it would be moderately to extremely effective. When asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the quality of direct line to mental health and other resources, 83% said it would be moderately to extremely effective. When asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the quality of resiliency training, 70% said it would be moderately to extremely effective. When asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the quality of health and wellness training, 70%, said it would be moderately to extremely effective. When asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the quality of information on breathing techniques and stretching, 62% said it would be moderately to extremely effective. Little did the dispatcher realize that each one of these qualities are offered by their peer support program. The researcher knew this because she found these qualities in their department's peer support policy. When asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the quality of critical stress incident management, nearly 90% rated this quality to be moderately to extremely effective. It is unfortunate that the dispatchers did not realize that each one of their agencies offered this quality.

The last question asked about providing a rate of their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program was the quality of having a peer support program that would be specific to dispatch. This was rated at 73% to be moderately to extremely effective. It

would be interesting to know if having a peer support program specific to dispatch would change these results.

Summary

In summary, this dissertation sought to understand the relationship between peer support programs and burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. In order to explore this relationship, a survey was created combining the MBI–HSS and a researcher-derived series of questions. The researcher was able to show reliability and validity to the survey that was provided to the participants. The survey produced results indicating that there was not a significant correlation between having a peer support program in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers. However, it did show a strong positive association among the three components that relate to burnout. Chapter 4 presented the data collection process, data coding and cleaning, reliability and validity, and data analysis, and answered the research questions and findings. Chapter 5, Discussion and Recommendations, includes the summary of the study, findings, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the relationship between a peer support program and the potential impact it has on alleviating burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. The researcher explored several peer support programs offered by law enforcement agencies in order to gain knowledge and locate qualities that would be presented to participants. The survey allowed the participants to provide their perceived perception of each of the qualities the researcher located. By gathering this information, the researcher could provide a better understanding of what qualities are perceived to be beneficial to the 911 emergency dispatchers. These qualities can then be presented as helping lessen burnout within a dispatch center.

Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, discussion of results, recommendations for further research, limitations, and a conclusion.

Summary of the Study

Chapter 1 commenced with an introduction to the study, presenting who the 911 emergency dispatcher is and the job that he or she does. As a public servant, the dispatcher is in a position to want to help others; however, the feeling of failing to help others can bring on a sense of stress. For people in human service professions, helping others gives them a sense of purpose in life, but not being able to help is stressful (Guy et al., 2015). Chapter 1 explained the intentions of the researcher to find a connection, if there was one, between a peer support program and the impact it has in addressing burnout among the 911 emergency dispatchers. Chapter 1 provided the background and purpose of the study, which was to explore peer support programs in anticipation of locating qualities that can assist dispatchers in alleviating the stress of the job. In

understanding the relationship between peer support programs and burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers, departments can better assist their employees. The chapter also provided the research questions, significance of the problem, definitions of terms, and the organization of the study.

Chapter 2, the literature review, provided insight into the culture of law enforcement, specifically 911 emergency dispatchers. The culture that conditions those in law enforcement to be strong and stoic does not permit the normal human response to the tragedies they were exposed to (Levenson, 2016). The researcher explained that although the field units may be the first responders on the scene, the dispatcher is the first of the first responders because they take the initial call for service. The researcher provided the history, the need, and programs of peer support. Williams (2017) explained that because of the mental health crisis, police departments have developed peer support programs and have conducted critical incident debriefings. Chapter 2 continued by presenting burnout. The researcher utilized the resources developed by Christina Maslach, an American social psychologist and professor at the University of Berkeley, known for her research on occupational burnout. The impact of burnout on an emergency service provider's mood and social behavior has direct implications for his or her capacity to maintain the therapeutic relationship, both on the job and his or her everyday life, which provides the basis of much human services work (Maslach et al., 2016). Providing knowledge to the dispatchers about stress, vicarious trauma, and burnout can begin a process of deliverance. It is important to understand that the job they perform, what they hear and what they deal with, is not a normal clerical job. The overwhelming feelings they may be having are a normal reaction to the abnormal job and

traumatic events they must deal with on a daily work basis. Chapter 2 also presented the theoretical framework of this dissertation. The theoretical framework plays an important role in guiding the entire process of the research study. The researcher based this dissertation on emotional labor. Emotional labor has been defined in a variety of ways, including the “management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7) as well as the “effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions” (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987). Chapter 2 provided several lengthy reviews of other literature to give the reader a full understanding of the purpose of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 explained the researcher’s intentions in conducting a nonexperimental quantitative research study. It recapped the purpose of the study, which sought to understand the relationship between peer support programs and burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. The research methodology explained how the researcher presented a nonexperimental quantitative research study. As the researcher examined the two variables, the independent variable (peer support) and dependent variable (burnout), she used a statistical analysis by way of a quantitative research design. Three research questions were presented, that provided a criterion for individuals to follow in order to participate. Three separate county agencies participated in taking the survey. The total population of possible participants was approximately 350. The researcher hoped to receive completed surveys from at least 50% of the sample. The instrumentation and data collection procedures were explained. The researcher explained that two instruments, based upon the variables, were used and combined into one survey. Participants took the survey by way of SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey provided easy

access to the survey for the participants as they all worked different shifts. SurveyMonkey also allowed for total anonymity. Data cleaning procedures and limitations were explained. The researcher had originally placed a couple of restrictions on participation. The first was that participants needed to be full-time dispatchers. The second was that participants needed to be trained in both the public safety answering point (PSAP) position and the radio position. However, after comparing the statistics on participants who worked either one or both of the positions, it was clear that burnout was a possibility in either case. Therefore, the data cleaning was only needed for the first restriction. The researcher concluded the chapter with potential limitations. She explained that the participants' lack of participation, understanding, caring, or taking the study seriously could be a limitation. The researcher encouraged her primary contacts from each agency to take time to explain the importance of the survey and the extent of participation needed from their coworkers.

Chapter 4 covered the findings of the study, data collection process, data coding and cleaning, reliability and validity, data analysis, and addressed the research questions. The chapter concluded by introducing Chapter 5.

Findings

The results of this study showed that there was an overall weak relationship between the two variables: peer support and burnout. The researcher provided an extensive amount of scholarly peer-reviewed articles, books, and sources addressing the relationship between peer support and burnout. Solomon (2004) hypothesized that peer support was effective through processes such as social and emotional support (e.g., the sense of normalcy provided by sharing with individuals who have had similar

experiences). The researcher provided a list of qualities that were perceived to be effective by the participants. As the participant rated each quality, he or she provided this researcher with insight for future studies that could be conducted to further explore a peer support program for law enforcement agencies across the nation. The qualities that the researcher provided (except for two) were located within the peer support program policies of the participants and other agencies. It was unfortunate that the dispatchers did not realize that they already had access to these qualities.

The researcher was able to gain an understanding into the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment that the dispatchers were feeling. This understanding provided answers to the three research questions within this dissertation. Historically, the burnout concept emerged in human services (Borritz, 2006). As the dispatchers provide that voice-to-voice contact with the public as well as the field units, they needed to be able to remain professional and focused yet empathetic. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization need to remain controlled. The dispatcher needs to feel a sense of personal accomplishment in order to remain positive in the job. Although the researcher was unable to include the full Maslach Burnout Inventory–Human Services Survey (MBI–HSS) instrument because of copyright restrictions, the researcher was able to make available a question from each grouping within the instrument. The researcher believed these questions were important so the reader could gain an understanding of just how the dispatchers answered these questions. The three research questions are based upon emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Findings for Research Question 1

Figure 3 shows the results for Question 8, which was based on emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is identified as being emotionally overextended, overwhelmed, and exhausted by one's work. Of the participants, 53% answered that they felt emotionally drained from work at least once a week to every day. Higher scores correspond to greater experiences of burnout (Maslach et al., 2016).

Q8 I feel emotionally drained from my work

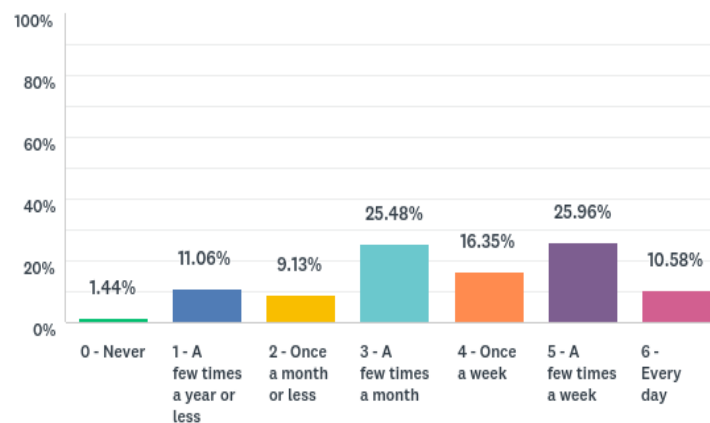


Figure 3. Emotional exhaustion.

Research Question 1 was based upon a peer support program for dispatchers and the impact it may or may not have on one's level of emotional exhaustion. The question states, "To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of emotional exhaustion?" The Pearson correlation between emotional exhaustion and the perceived effectiveness of a peer support program was $-.212$ ($n = 199$), indicating a strong negative association. The Pearson correlation between emotional exhaustion and perceived effectiveness of program components (qualities) was $-.325$ ($n = 203$), indicating a strong negative association. The results show that the independent variable

(peer support) shows a negative connection to the dependent variable (burnout).

Therefore, in answering Research Question 1, there is a strong negative connection and no impact to emotional exhaustion in a participant utilizing a peer support program.

Figure 4 shows results for Question 22, which is founded upon depersonalization. Depersonalization measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients on one's service, care, treatment or instruction (Maslach et al., 2016). Of the participants, 23% answered that they do not really care what happens to some recipients at least once a week to every day. Although this percentage is not as high as that of emotional exhaustion, it is still alarming. Higher scores correspond to greater experiences of burnout (Maslach et al., 2016).

Q22 I don't really care what happens to some recipients.

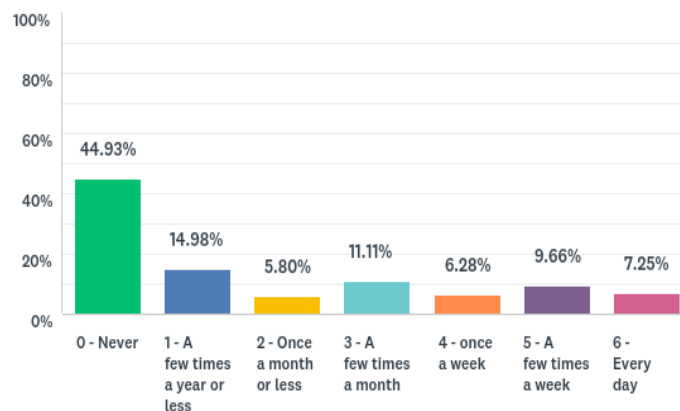


Figure 4. Depersonalization.

Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was based upon a peer support program for dispatchers and the impact it may or may not have on one's level of depersonalization. The question states, "To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level

of depersonalization?” The Pearson correlation between depersonalization and the perceived effectiveness of a peer support program was $-.218$ ($n = 202$), indicating a strong negative association. The Pearson correlation between depersonalization and perceived effectiveness of program components (qualities) was $-.175$ ($n = .202$), indicating a strong negative association. The results show that the independent variable (peer support) shows a negative connection to the dependent variable (burnout). Therefore, in answering Research Question 2, there is a strong negative connection and no impact to depersonalization in a participant utilizing a peer support program.

Figure 5 shows the results for Question 26, which is founded upon personal accomplishments. Personal accomplishment assesses the feelings of competence and successful achievement in one’s work with people (Maslach et al., 2016). Of the participants, 63% answered that they believe they have accomplished many worthwhile things in the job they do. This shows that the dispatchers who participated are not showing a high level of burnout for this question. Lower scores correspond to a greater experience of burnout (Maslach et al., 2016).

Q26 I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.

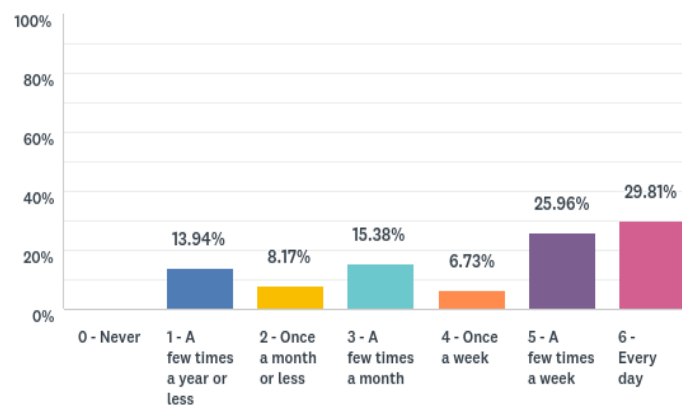


Figure 5. Personal accomplishments.

Findings for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was based upon a peer support program for dispatchers and the impact it may or may not have on one's level of personal accomplishment. The question states, "To what extent, if any, does utilizing a peer support program impact one's level of personal accomplishment?" The Pearson correlation between personal accomplishment and the perceived effectiveness of a peer support program was .015 ($n = 197$), indicating a weak relationship with a r^2 value of 2.25. The Pearson correlation between emotional exhaustion and perceived effectiveness of program components (qualities) was .13 ($n = 198$), indicating a weak relationship with a r^2 value of 0.02. The results show that the independent variable (peer support) shows a weak connection to the dependent variable (burnout). However, as previously stated, personal accomplishment was going to provide an opposite finding because of the questions. Although the results show a weak relationship between variables, Research Question 3 had to be answered because there is no impact to personal accomplishment in a participant utilizing a peer support program.

The researcher found it interesting when the dispatchers provided a high correlation score in being aware that their agency had a peer support program, yet they did not utilize it. For example, Question 30 asked if dispatchers are aware that their agency has a peer support program. Research findings determined that over 95% were aware. Question 31 asked how often dispatchers utilized a peer support program. Research data determined that 80% never utilized their peer support program. Findings confirm that dispatchers are aware that their agency has a peer support program; however, they are not utilizing it. Findings indicate that there is a higher probability that

departments may not be informing dispatch members that peer support is available or that there is a lack of leadership within the department in support of the peer support programs. It is plausible that dispatchers may not reach out to a peer supporter because they are too overcome by the stress of the job, they do not want to divulge personal information, and/or they are too stoic to reach out. Another option could be that the dispatchers are not interested in what their peer support program has to offer or understand that peer support is not specific to work-related incidents. Regardless, departments should ensure that all members are provided opportunities to participate in a peer support program.

Because dispatchers are public servants, it is their job to remain professional. Historically, public servants were trained to assist the public without divulging their own opinions and influences. Luther Gulick was an American political scientist who was known as an expert in public administration. His views on public administration changed over the duration of his career. Kramer (2002) described Gulick's work of 70 years ago as advancing the merits of a mechanistic, dehumanized, and emotionless model of administration, asserting that public administrators "are supposed to be smooth running machines—transmission belts for carrying out the will of the people" (p. 140). Although Gulick progressed from his views on administrators being mechanistic, dehumanized, and emotionless, he still viewed the administrator as a smooth-running machine whose job was to carry out the will of the public. This may be so; however, the public servant is still human, and the emotional labor of the job can become stressful.

In this study, the intent of the researcher was to help find balance for dispatchers because the job that they do is stressful. Senior Dispatcher Searle (personal

communication, January 3, 2019) stated that she is constantly fighting a battle to gain some sense of control or at least a sense of balance, as she is losing that fight, which added additional stress. She mentioned lack of time, medical issues, depression, and issues both at home and work, and how that is a vicious cycle, a catch-22. The most important challenge facing public administrators is not to make their work more efficient but to make it more human and caring (Guy et al., 2015). Some individuals are able to cope with burnout, as the results from the personal accomplishment revealed, but others cannot.

Limitations

The primary concern of this study was to gain knowledge about the impact of a peer support program in addressing burnout among 911 emergency dispatchers. It was vital that this study was presented to participants to ensure honesty, validity, and reliability. The three primary contacts who were utilized in forwarding the letter of participation to their supervisors and dispatchers needed to be individuals who were trustworthy, approachable, and willing to provide the participants an overview of the importance of the survey. The researcher does not know if this actually occurred. Of the approximately 350 available participants, 208 (59%) actually took the survey. That was a sufficient number as the goal of the researcher was to reach a minimum of 50%. The time frame during which the survey was sent out was near the holidays. Although the job of the dispatcher is 24/7, 7 days a week, and he or she works holidays, there are still lower staff levels because many may be on vacation.

Another limitation may have been the way the dispatchers answered the survey questions. The MBI-HSS instrument that was utilized may not have been worded in a

way to which the dispatcher could relate. For example, Question 22, “I don’t really care what happens to some recipients,” had some dispatchers questioning what a “recipient” was. The dispatchers call the public “reporting parties” (RPs). The literature presented in Chapter 2 explained how the dispatcher is aware that everything he or she does, taking a call for service and what they say over the phone and radio, is recorded and at will to be addressed. Did the dispatchers feel they could honestly answer that question without having any repercussion for their answer? What was the dispatcher’s state of mind at the time of answering the survey? The survey was provided to the dispatchers to take either while they were working or when they were off the clock. Participants taking the survey may have felt overwhelmed and took the survey to “just take it.”

Recommendations

This topic needs further study and clarification. When the workplace does not recognize the human side of work and the emotional labor required to effectively perform this work, then the risk of burnout grows, carrying with it a high price (Maslach & Leiter 2016). When a department shows interest in its employees and begins to make a difference within the department by providing resources to help alleviate stress and burnout, employees may begin to feel appreciated. Providing education on topics such as stress/stressors, burnout, vicarious trauma, anxiety, and so many more may assist the dispatchers. It is recommended that this education be made more specific to dispatchers as well as available to them on a daily basis. This recommendation may be done by departments within a specific time frame. Each dispatcher at some point during his or her shift (and not on break) could receive a set time to watch a video on decompressing and stress relief, to take a walk, or just to talk about an incident. This may assist in relieving

dispatchers' stress and therefore help them to not become burned out. By departments having the dispatcher take the time while he or she is clocked in shows the dispatcher that the department cares enough for him or her to allow that to be done on the department's time.

The survey results provided in Chapter 4 under data analysis indicated an overall low correlation between having a peer support program in addressing burnout. However, the research determined that the findings contradict each other. On Instrument B, the dispatchers were asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the qualities of confidentiality and a safe place to talk, direct line to mental health and other resources, resiliency training, health and wellness training, a peer support program being specific to dispatch, information on breathing techniques and stretching, and critical stress incident management. Each of the components provided a highly rated correlation by the dispatchers in being effective if they were involved in a peer support program. For example, Question 40 asked respondents to rate their perceived effectiveness of a peer support program with the quality of a peer support program being specific to dispatch. The researcher determined that 73% of respondents believed that a peer support program was *moderately effective* to *extremely effective*. The research data findings in Question 40 provided a surprisingly high correlation score compared to Question 32, which asked respondents, "How often do you find your peer support program to be helpful in your job duties?" Research data findings determined that 53.62% answered *never*. Additional research may be an option to consider whether dispatchers prefer a peer support program specific to dispatchers only.

The possibility of creating a nationwide peer support program specific to dispatch that provides a policy and procedure for all departments to join might be a solution. An opportunity to “talk shop” and to ventilate feelings with coworkers was a recurring theme in the interviews and an important source of social support (Guy et al., 2015). Gaines and Jermier (1983) and Leiter and Maslach (2004) mentioned how interaction with coworkers is cited as the most important source of job stress and burnout. Who better knows the job that the dispatcher does than the dispatcher. Although this study allowed participants to choose to answer the demographic questions, it would be interesting to do a comparison of participants’ age and time on the job to their level of burnout. The researcher could group ages and time to the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Conclusion

Law enforcement departments can no longer afford to disregard and ignore the stressors and traumas to which their personnel are exposed. They need to realize that their dispatchers are dealing with many of the same issues as the field units. This research study was not meant to lessen or denigrate what the field units deal with, rather it was meant to illustrate and provide clarity into the job of the dispatcher. The literature provides insight into the job of the dispatcher. What dispatchers hear over the phone and do not hear over the radio, tells them that something could be happening to the field unit. The dispatcher may not be the first physically on scene, but he or she is the first of the first to be on scene by way of the phone. They soothe the reporting party, provide information that assists the field unit, and decipher what type of call the field unit will be handling. The job of the dispatcher is emotionally laboring as are most public servant

jobs. Burnout has been identified as the primary negative outcome associated with the performance of emotional labor (Guy et al., 2015). The human cost of emotional labor can be devastating if not understood, recognized, or addressed.

Steinberg (1999) provided an emotional labor scale. He identified four factors that capture the detailed content of emotional labor: “human relations, communication skills, emotional effort, and responsibility for client well-being” (Steinberg, 1999, p. 149). Steinberg provided a definition for each factor. The researcher found Steinberg’s three categories of emotional labor recognition to be helpful information, especially advanced recognition:

Advanced recognition of emotional labor involves an appreciation for the full range of emotional requirements in the workplace, particularly the need to employ persuasion techniques, understand group dynamics, handle emotionally charged issues publicly, deal with dangerous or hostile people, deal with highly sensitive issues, and take responsibility for the well-being of others, whether subordinates or clients. (Steinberg, 1999, p. 149)

The dispatcher is provided training, education, and instruction on how to serve the public. He or she is provided with limited training on education and instruction on how to recognize or handle the stress of the job. Literature shows that emotional labor and burnout are inextricably linked. Burnout is a silent partner of many workers in human services (Guy et al., 2015).

Marshall and Laorenza (2018), editors of *The Resilient 9-1-1 Professional*, addressed how departments that provide peer support programs whether it be “informal” or “official” would benefit, making it clear to their employees that peer support is a

volunteer program that involves individuals who work with them. These individuals are either nominated or have chosen to volunteer their time to assist their coworkers. They know and understand the demands of the job and the stresses the job can bring. They are trained to listen or direct an employee to resources whether job related or not. Peer support and the resources provided are available to employees under several circumstances, not just work-related incidents. Peer supporters need to be aware and make an effort to be present, approachable, and willing to listen to employees at any time. Peer supporters need to be willing to observe and be vigilant to those they work with. When the peer supporter views a coworker who has distanced him or herself, whose sick leave has increased, and/or he or she has appeared to have changed in his or her persona in any way, it may be time to be supportive. Marshall and Laorenza believed that offering relief on stressors on a day-to-day basis can help to decrease the risks of cumulative stress conditions, and the quality of life, morale, and performance are safeguarded. Changing the perception and providing a better understanding of how peer support can be utilized may assist in the willingness of employees to reach out more often no matter the circumstance.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate

Title of Dissertation: The Perceived Impact of Peer Support in Addressing Burnout Amongst 911 Emergency Dispatchers

I would like to invite you to participate in a study in assisting me in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) with California Baptist University in Riverside CA, working under the supervision of Dr. Mark Kling, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at California Baptist University. The purpose of the study is to determine the impact that a peer support program may or may not have on addressing burnout amongst 911 emergency dispatchers.

Due to the time restrictions of the researcher, she is seeking the assistance of Supervisors and line level dispatchers from specific agencies within California. If you have received this invitation your agency was chosen due to the size of your County. Participants need to be full time employed Supervisors or dispatchers and have been trained to work both the PSAP position and radio position (not necessarily at the same time). If you fit the criteria and are willing to participate please continue to the weblink provided at the bottom of the page to take the survey. Please do not forward this invitation to anyone outside of your County agency. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Your decision to participate or not to participate in this research study will under no circumstance affect your relationship with CBU.

The information and data gathered from you will be published. However, your identity as well as the agency you work for will be kept completely confidential. The researcher does not anticipate any risk to you and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The survey will be presented electronically and formatted by survey monkey. The time duration is approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Be advised in participating in this study you will not be compensated in any way. Your participation is appreciated. If you have any questions prior or you would like to know of the outcome and results of the final study, feel free to do so by emailing me at psoria@calbaptist.edu

If you have any questions regarding this study or your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. M. Kling at mkling@calbaptist.edu

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research study, its procedures, risks and benefits, you should contact the Institutional Review Board at irb@calbaptist.edu or call (951) 552-8626. IRB is a group of faculties who review research applications to ensure the protection of people participating in research.

Thank you,

Pauline Soria
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NHTNHWG>

APPENDIX B

Consent Form for Survey

Title of Dissertation: The Impact of Peer Support in Addressing Burnout Amongst 911
Emergency Dispatchers

I agree to participate in the electronic study presented by Pauline Soria doctoral student at California Baptist University (CBU).

I understand that the survey will consist of questions regarding emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and peer support.

There are 41 questions that will be asked with an approximate time frame of 10 minutes.

I understand this is voluntary, that I can refuse to answer any questions and am able to withdraw from participating at any time.

APPENDIX C

Instrument A: Mind Garden Licensing Purchase Document

For use by Pauline Soria only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on July 22, 2018



To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Maslach Burnout Inventory forms: Human Services Survey, Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel, Educators Survey, General Survey, or General Survey for Students.

The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument form may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

**Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.
Sample Items:**

MBI - Human Services Survey - MBI-HSS:

I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some recipients.

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MBI - Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel - MBI-HSS (MP):

I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some patients.

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MBI - Educators Survey - MBI-ES:

I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some students.

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Cont'd on next page

MBI - General Survey - MBI-GS:

I feel emotionally drained from my work.
In my opinion, I am good at my job.
I doubt the significance of my work.

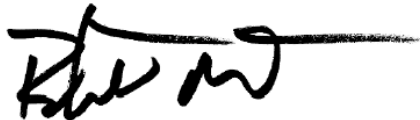
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www.mindgarden.com

MBI - General Survey for Students - MBI-GS (S):

I feel emotionally drained by my studies.
In my opinion, I am a good student.
I doubt the significance of my studies.

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www.mindgarden.com

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Most', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

APPENDIX D

Instrument B: Peer Support/Peer Support Program

30. Are you aware that your agency has a Peer Support program?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

31. How often do you utilize your Peer Support program?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always
- ☐ I was not aware I had a Peer Support program

32. How often do you find your Peer Support program to be helpful in your job duties?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always
- ☐ I was not aware I had a Peer Support program

33. How often do you feel a Peer Support program would help alleviate emotional exhaustion (tiredness, fatigue) from your work day

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

34. How often do you feel a Peer Support program would help from being cynical (skeptical, sarcastic) in the way you view things?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

35. How often do you think a Peer Support program would help in creating a higher level of efficacy (value) within the work place

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

36. Rate your perceived effectiveness of a Peer Support program with the quality

of: *confidentiality & a safe place to talk*

- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Extremely effective

37. Rate your perceived effectiveness of a Peer Support program with the quality

of: *Direct line to mental health & other resources*

- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Extremely effective

38. Rate your perceived effectiveness of a Peer Support program with the quality

of: *Resiliency Training*

- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Extremely effective

39. Rate your perceived effectiveness of a Peer Support program with the quality

of: *Health & Wellness Training*

- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Extremely effective

40. Rate your perceived effectiveness of a Peer Support program with the quality of: *A*

Peer Support Program being specific to dispatch

- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Extremely effective

41. Rate your perceived effectiveness of a Peer Support program with the quality

of: *Information on breathing techniques & stretching*

- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Extremely effective

42. Rate your perceived effectiveness of a Peer Support program with the quality

of: *Critical Stress Incident Management*

- ☐ Not at all effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Extremely effective

APPENDIX E

Pearson Correlation Coefficient Scale

		Correlations				
		Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal accomplishment	Perceived effectiveness of peer support program	Perceived effectiveness of program components
Emotional Exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	1	.624**	-.273**	-.212**	-.325**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.002	.000
	N	206	203	199	203	203
Depersonalization	Pearson Correlation	.624**	1	-.238**	-.218**	-.175*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001	.002	.013
	N	203	205	198	202	202
Personal accomplishment	Pearson Correlation	-.273**	-.238**	1	.015	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001		.832	.055
	N	199	198	200	197	198
Perceived effectiveness of peer support program	Pearson Correlation	-.212**	-.218**	.015	1	.610**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.002	.832		.000
	N	203	202	197	205	203
Perceived effectiveness of program components	Pearson Correlation	-.325**	-.175*	.137	.610**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.013	.055	.000	
	N	203	202	198	203	205

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX F

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

RE: IRB Review

IRB No.: 045-1819-EXP

Project: The Perceived Impact of Peer Support in Addressing Burnout Among 911 Emergency Dispatchers

Date Complete Application Received: 10/23/18

Principle Investigator: Pauline L. Soria

Faculty Advisor: Mark Kling

College/Department: OPS

IRB Determination: Expedited Application Approved— Student research using anonymous survey questionnaires; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Waiver of Documentation of Consent: Per 45 CFR 46.117, the IRB has approved the request to waive the documentation of informed consent (e.g., no participant signatures will be collected, though participants do receive a copy of the consent information) because the signature of the participant would be the only linking record to the data that may harm the participant if released.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: Approval is granted for one year from date below. If you would like to continue research activities beyond that date, you are responsible for submitting a Research Renewal Request with enough time for that request to be reviewed and approved *prior* to the expiration of the project. In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: November 14, 2018