

# Exploring the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme

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Mini-dissertation submitted in **partial** fulfillment of the requirements for the degree *Magister Commercii* in **Industrial Psychology** at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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May 2015



## **DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY OF RESEARCH**

I, Heleen Coetzee, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation entitled “Exploring the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme” is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and relevant literature references as shown in the references.

I further declare that the content of this research will not be handed in for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

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**HELEEN COETZEE**  
**NOVEMBER 2014**

## COMMENTS

The reader should bear the following in mind:

- The editorial style follows the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (6<sup>th</sup> edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA). However, a modified version of the format is used in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The format used for the research article is in accordance with the guidelines for authors for the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (SAJIP).
- The revised research proposal forms the first chapter of the mini-dissertation. Therefore, this chapter is presented in a different voice when compared to subsequent chapters which report on actual results.
- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of three chapters, which include one research article (chapter 2). Chapter 1 and 3 have numbered sections according to the formatting followed in the research unit, WorkWell.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Josh. 1: 9*

I would like to present the following recognitions:

- My Lord Jesus, my Saviour, for helping me through each day and giving me the opportunity to do this mini-dissertation.
- My family, Mam, Pap, Gerna, Marisa and Marais, who supported me and wiped all the tears away when times were hard.
- Prof. Lené Jorgensen, my supervisor. I could not have asked for a better supervisor during this study. Your love for the profession and your insight and knowledge have touched me deeply. Thank you for your understanding and encouragement throughout the study.
- Dr. Lizelle Brink, my co-supervisor. Thank you for all the guidance you gave me regarding the qualitative aspects of the study, your wisdom has been much appreciated. Thank you that I can call you a friend and a companion.
- Mr. Bouwer Jonker, my assistant-supervisor. Thank you for the time you spend on going through my mini-dissertation, and giving me constructive feedback.
- Retha Watson. This study could not have been done without your help and insight within the SAPS. Thank you for always taking time to help and motivate me. It was an honour to work with you.
- Special thanks and note of appreciation to all of the participants. The study would not have been possible without your participation.
- Neil Barnes, my language editor. Thank you for your time in perfecting the language of the study.

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## SUMMARY

**Title:** Exploring the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme

**Keywords:** Trauma, workplace trauma, trauma counselling, trauma training programmes, South African Police Service

Exposure of employees to traumatic experiences in the workplace is a reality that many organisations face. Although not every person exposed to a traumatic experience will necessarily develop post-traumatic stress, the workplace still has a responsibility to assist individuals to deal with psychological reactions after a traumatic experience. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is one such organisation, where employees run a particularly high risk of being exposed to traumatic experiences while performing their tasks. In order to help employees of the SAPS to debrief their trauma, trauma counsellors are necessary. Within the SAPS, trauma counsellors are trained in an adapted version of Mitchell's Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) model, with the underlying focus to establish a sense of safety for the police official. The trauma counsellors in the SAPS are trained by means of an experiential learning experience, where journaling is utilised to capture personal experiences during the training.

The objective of the study was therefore to explore the experience of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme. A qualitative research design was utilised following a phenomenology approach. The social constructivism paradigm was also utilised in this research study. Trauma counsellors ( $N=12$ ) in the SAPS were used as case study for this research, where a purposive homogeneous non-probability sampling technique was implemented. The journal entries made by the participants during the nine day training programme were used as a data collection method.

Four categories were extracted from the data, namely, thoughts regarding trauma counsellor's experiences, emotion experiences of counsellors, the impact of daily experiences on counsellors and the participants' view on how their competence of efficiency would change in the future. The results showed that the training programme was an effective strategy to

train the counsellors. The counsellors showed increased self-awareness and self-insight after the training. The participants gained insight and understanding of how police officials experience trauma. The findings showed that the participants felt empowered and more confident to assist police officials with their trauma recovery. In relation to their training, counsellors made recommendations for the future training of trauma counsellors within the SAPS.

Finally, recommendations were made for future research as well as the implications of the study for the industrial psychology practise.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** Die verkenning van die ervarings van traumaberaders tydens 'n traumaberading opleidingsprogram

**Sleutelwoorde:** Trauma, werkplek trauma, trauma berading, ervaringsleer, die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisie diens

Die blootstelling van werknemers aan traumatiese ervarings in die werkplek is 'n realiteit wat baie organisasies in die gesig staar. Alhoewel nie elke werknemer aan trauma blootgestel word nie, is dit die werkplek se verantwoordelikheid om diegene wat wel aan traumatiese ervarings blootgestel word, by te staan deur middel van sielkundige berading. Die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisie diens (SAPD) is 'n organisasie waar werknemers 'n bepaalde hoë risiko loop om aan traumatiese ervarings blootgestel te word tydens die uitvoering van hul take. Ten einde die werknemers van die SAPD te help om hul trauma te hanteer, is traumaberaders nodig. Binne die SAPD word traumaberaders opgelei volgens 'n aangepaste weergawe van Mitchell se Kritiese insident stresbestuurmodel. Die onderliggende fokus van die model is om 'n gevoel van veiligheid te vestig vir die polisiebeamptes. Die traumaberaders in die SAPD word opgelei deur middel van 'n ervaringsleër-ervaring, waar joernaalinskrywings gebruik word om persoonlike ervarings neer te skryf tydens die opleiding.

Die doel van die studie was dus om die ervarings van beraders tydens 'n traumaberadingsopleidingsprogram te verken. Die studie was 'n kwalitatiewe studie, en 'n fenomenologiese benadering was gebruik. Die sosiale konstruktivisme paradigma is verder ook gebruik in hierdie studie. Trauma beraders ( $N=12$ ) in die SAPD is as gevallestudie gebruik waar 'n doelgerigte homogene nie-waarskynlikheid steekproefnemingstechniek gebruik was. Die joernaalinskrywings van die beraders was gebruik as data-insamelingstechniek.

Vier kategorieë was uit die data onttrek, naamlik die gedagtes aangaande die ervarings van traumaberaders tydens die opleiding, die traumaberaders se emosionele ervarings, die impak van die daaglikse ervarings op die beraders en hoe die bevoegdheid van beraders in die toekoms kan verbeter. Die resultate het getoon dat die opleidingsprogram 'n effektiewe strategie was om die beraders in traumaberading op te lei. Na die opleiding het die beraders

het verhoogde selfinsig en begrip vir polisiebeamptes se ervarings getoon. Die resultate het aangedui dat die deelnemers bemagtig gevoel het en meer selfvertroue gewys het om polisiebeamptes by te staan met hul herstel proses na 'n traumatiese ervaring. Met betrekking tot hul opleiding, het beraders aanbevelings vir die toekoms gegee ten opsigte van die opleiding van traumaberaders binne die SAPD.

Laastens word aanbevelings gemaak vir toekomstige navorsing, sowel as die implikasies van die studie vir die bedryfsielkundige praktyk

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

This mini-dissertation focuses on the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme. This chapter consists of a problem statement and a discussion of the research objectives. The research design, method, and strategy followed in this study will be discussed hereafter.

### 1.1 Problem statement

Exposure of employees to traumatic experiences in the workplace is a reality that many organisations face (Tehrani, 2004). In any workplace, at any given time, sudden deaths occur, jobs are lost or restructured and accidents happen (see Everly, Flannery & Mitchell, 2000; Hoffman, 2012). The memory of the World Trade Centre traumatic incident that took place in 2001 is still a reality across the world (North, *et al.*, 2013). Employees working in shopping malls were recently traumatised by a spate of armed robberies leaving several individuals injured or killed (Anon, 2014). Although not every person exposed to a traumatic experience will necessarily develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the workplace still has a responsibility to assist individuals to deal with psychological reactions after a traumatic experience (Tehrani, 2004). The South African Police Service (SAPS) is one such organisation where employees run a particular high risk of being exposed to traumatic experiences while performing their tasks (Kopel & Friedman, 1999). Psychologists, social workers and chaplains employed in the SAPS assist police officials with trauma counselling. These counsellors are trained in a trauma counselling programme specifically adapted for the police environment. The aim of this study is to report on the experiences of counsellors during the trauma counselling training programme. By doing so, this study will contribute to the scientific knowledge in the field of workplace trauma management.

The term trauma is often associated with a medical condition (physical trauma). The origin of the term lies in a Greek word which means “to tear or to puncture” (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010, p. 2). Referring to psychological trauma, this would imply psychological wounding (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). Mitchell (1983b) views a traumatic event as more severe than a crisis with a

more unpredictable onset, which involves an individual experiencing, witnessing or being confronted with actual or threatened death, serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of others' or the self. The response would include intense helplessness or horror. The World Health Organisation (WHO) includes the category PTSD in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 10) (Scott & Stradling, 2004; Tehrani, 2004). Within this category ICD 10 describes three diagnoses, namely acute stress reaction, adjustment disorder and PTSD. Acute stress disorder can develop within minutes after a traumatic incident while adjustment disorder refers to the states of disturbance that developed in the period of adaptation to the life change or stressful event (symptoms usually begins within one month) (Scott & Stradling, 2004; Tehrani, 2004). Traumatic stress is defined in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (APA, 2013) as:

Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence in one or more of the following ways:

1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s), as it occurred to others.
3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g.) first responders, collecting human remains, police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse (p. 271).

According to the American Psychiatric Association traumatic events are viewed as sexual and physical assault, kidnapping, disasters, vehicle accidents, and life-threatening illnesses, as well as witnessing death or serious injury (APA, 2000). Childhood sexual abuse is also viewed as a traumatic incident even if it does not involve threatened or actual violence or injury (APA, 2000). As indicated in the DSM-5 SAPS officials are often exposed to these potential traumatic events since they are usually among the first responders at the scene and run the risk of prolonged psychological reactions (SAPS, 2009). Officials are therefore encouraged to report for assistance after any traumatic event to address and manage trauma reactions (SAPS, 2009). It is important for trauma counsellors to have an understanding of trauma reactions including knowledge of acute stress disorder and PTSD to effectively

address these reactions within the police officials (SAPS Formal Debriefing Training Manual, 2013).

Typical reactions to a traumatic incident fall within three main phases according to Tehrani (2004); immediate reactions during the trauma, acute reactions in the month following the trauma and long-term reactions. During the past decade awareness has increased to develop crises management and recovery plans for employees in order to manage trauma reactions (Tehrani, 2004). Upon reviewing literature relating to traumatic stress, extensive debate is found concerning the advantages and disadvantages of models of trauma intervention (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). However what is clear is that after a traumatic incident took place in the workplace, employees usually require a range of practical, physical and psychological support (Hoffman, 2012; Tehrani, 2004).

Kaminer and Eagle (2010) suggest that trauma counselling can be divided into three sub fields; acute interventions (also named *debriefing*), short term counselling and long term counselling or therapy. Since the 1980s and early nineties, psychological debriefing has been a popular post-trauma intervention. Psychological debriefing was originally used as an intervention for emergency service personnel as a group intervention. Mitchell (1983b), Dyregov (1989) and Armstrong, O'Callahan and Marmar (1991) developed debriefing interventions primarily for emergency personnel, while Raphael (1986) focused on victims of disasters (see Tehrani, 2004). While debriefing is effective shortly after the incident, trauma therapy and counselling should be introduced when trauma symptoms do not subside (Scott & Stradling, 2004; Tehrani, 2004). Three crucial aspects during the treatment of traumatic stress should be taken in account by counsellors, namely; establish a sense of safety for the individual, process and integrate the trauma and re-engagement with the larger community (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010).

Within the SAPS, trauma counsellors are trained in an adapted version of Mitchell's Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). The underlying focus of the model is to establish a sense of safety for the police official (Watson, personal communication, June 13, 2014). The CISM model was adapted by a group of psychologists', social workers and chaplains under the auspices of Elize Jacobs. The adapted model includes a police-focussed model consisting of seven phases following a trauma management process (Watson, personal communication,

June 13, 2014). The seven phases consist of an introductory phase, where the importance of confidentiality is explained as well as the ground rules and the aims of the objectives of the debriefing session. The fact, thinking and feeling phases follow which focus on the detail and sensory stimuli before, during and after the traumatic incident. The stress reaction and stress management phases focus on informing the police official that the feelings, thoughts and acts they have after the traumatic incident are normal. An important aspect of the trauma counselling is focusing on the following up process, which is the last phase, observing the official and ensuring the official has friends and family members available (Watson, personal communication, June 13, 2014). This model is effective within the policing environment and can be applied within a multi-cultural organisation (Maabela, 2011; SAPS Formal Debriefing Manual, 2013). Since the SAPS trauma intervention model is based on the three sub fields suggested in literature (acute interventions/debriefing), short term counselling and long term counselling/therapy), the term *trauma counselling* is used in this study to encompass the three sub fields, as opposed to merely referring to a debriefing training programme.

Counselling literature suggests that working with trauma victims can be both exhausting and rewarding (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010; Tehrani, 2004). Trauma counsellors need to be focused, present, empathic, calm and highly skilled (McKim & Smith-Adcock, 2014). Training of trauma counsellors should therefore be specifically aimed at stimulating these skills. According to Robitschek (1998), experiential learning is an effective training method to train counsellors. Experiential learning can be regarded as an effective training method for counsellors, since learning takes place through observation and interaction as opposed to merely learning material from a textbook (Itin, 1999). Through this method training is experienced first-hand, instead of hearing or reading about others' experiences, which contributes significantly to the learner's overall understanding of the real-time environment (Mckenzie, 2000). Experiential learning encourages participants to be directly involved in the experience and then to reflect on their experiences using analytic skills. Thereby the learners gain insight into the new knowledge, and learning is retained (Kompf & Bond, 2001).

The trauma counselling training programme in the SAPS is based on experiential learning principles. Various training exercises, such as role plays, simulations and tests are included in the training in order to directly involve learners in the training experience. During the training, journaling is also used to allow learners to reflect on the learning experience

(Watson, personal communication, June 13, 2014). Literature indicates journaling to be a class of methodology used for examining everyday experiences (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). This study aims to explore the experiences of the counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme, as recorded in the journals. No previous research could be found where journals were used to capture data during a trauma counselling training.

From the aforementioned the following research questions can be formulated:

- How is trauma and trauma counselling conceptualised in the literature?
- What is the content and methodology of a trauma counselling training programme for the SAPS?
- What experiences do trauma counsellors capture in their journals during the training?
- What recommendations can be made for training trauma counsellors in the SAPS?

## 1.2 Expected contribution of the study

### **1.2.1 Contribution to industrial/organisational psychology literature**

An important focus within the field of industrial psychology is employees coping within stressful environments. Especially in the SAPS, where police officials are often confronted with traumatic situations, an increasing number of studies focus on how to assist police officials. In order to ensure the training programme used to train personnel to counsel these police officials is sufficient, research on the topic is important. By studying the training programme of trauma counsellors within the SAPS, new knowledge about this topic will be added to the discipline. Moreover, recent studies show that I-O psychologists should be trained in effective counselling skills such as trauma counselling (Barkhuizen, Jorgensen & Brink, 2014).

### **1.2.2 Contribution to the industrial psychologist**

Workplace counselling is an essential skill for industrial psychologists. Industrial psychology interns are expected to provide counselling, diagnose workplace related psychopathology (e.g., burnout) and general psychopathology (e.g., psychological trauma) and to refer accordingly (South Africa Department of Health, 2012). A training programme in trauma counselling skills which is proven to be effective would thus benefit the industrial

psychologist. Industrial psychologists will be able to use the knowledge gained on this topic during trauma counselling or during training of counsellors in trauma counselling.

### **1.2.3 Contribution to the individual**

This study aims to assist the participants to become aware of effective ways to provide trauma counselling to police officials. In addition, the individuals who participate in this study will have a better knowledge available regarding trauma counselling. The ultimate aim is to develop and improve the participants' trauma counselling skills.

## **1.3 Research objectives**

Research objectives are divided into a general objective and specific objectives.

### **1.3.1 General objective**

The general objective of this study is to explore the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme.

### **1.3.2 Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of this research are:

- To determine how trauma and trauma counselling is conceptualised in the literature.
- To determine what the content and methodology is of a trauma counselling training programme in the SAPS.
- To determine the experiences trauma counsellors capture in their journals during the training.
- To determine which recommendations can be made for training trauma counsellors in the SAPS.

## **1.4 Research design**

The following section focuses on the research approach, strategy and method used in this study.

### 1.4.1 Research approach

Social constructivism is utilised as the epistemological viewpoint for this study. Within a social constructivism paradigm, individuals are exposed to the same phenomenon, however, the way in which this phenomenon is experienced may differ between individuals (Wagner, Kwulich, & Garner, 2012). Therefore, an individual's experience of a phenomenon is his/her own reality. The way in which individuals experience a phenomenon may be influenced by their culture, social environment, history etc. Therefore, by making use of the social constructivism paradigm the researcher can explore the unique experiences of the trauma counsellors during the training (Wagner *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, within this study a qualitative phenomenological approach will be used. Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena, e.g. why and how people behave the way they do and what different perceptions exist between various groups (in this case the phenomenon is the trauma counseling training programme) (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 1998). Ultimately, as suggested by Hancock *et al.* (1998), qualitative research aims to answer questions such as why, how and in what way.

### 1.4.2 Research strategy

The research strategy that will be followed in this study is that of a case study. According to Mitchell (1983a), in Verschuren (2003), the term "case study" refers to "several different epistemological entities and allows the researcher the opportunity to tease out and disentangle a complex set of factors and relationships, albeit in one or a small number of instances" (p.122).

This method would be most applicable to this study, since one particular group of participants within an organisation (SAPS) is studied. Thus the trauma counsellors attending the trauma training programme constitute the case study.

### 1.4.3 Research method

The research method consists of the literature review, research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, research procedure, data collection methods, data recording, strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity, ethical considerations, data analysis, and reporting style.

### **1.4.3.1 Literature review**

A complete literature review regarding training in trauma counselling and the experience thereof amongst trainee trauma counsellors is done as part of the study. All relevant articles and textbooks are gathered among certain databases. Keywords that are utilised during the literature research entail: trauma, workplace trauma, trauma counselling, trauma training programmes, South African Police Service.

Sources include: EbscoHost, SAePublications, the Workplace Trauma Centre and Google Scholar. The American Psychological Association and South African Journal for Industrial Psychology. Furthermore the Journal of Traumatic Stress, the Occupational Medicine Journal, and various other journals are used to investigate the current phenomenon.

### **1.4.3.2 Research setting**

The study is conducted among helping profession employees of the SAPS who provide counselling to the police officials. The employees have to complete the training in trauma counselling in order to provide treatment to the officials following a specific model. The training is provided at a SAPS training venue which acts as research setting for this study. The participants are exposed to various exercises, in the outdoors as well as in a class room setting during the training.

### **1.4.3.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

The researcher gains entry to the participants through her supervisor. By joining an established research project, the researcher gains access to the participants on the training programme through one of the research team members. The researcher explains to the participants the aim of the study and invites them to participate. The objectives, research process, consent and anonymity of the research process are explained. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopts various roles in order to successfully complete the research study. Firstly, the researcher ensures that the study is planned accordingly to answer the research questions. The planning focuses specifically on selecting a representative sample of the entire population in an attempt to generalise the results to the bigger population. In essence, the researcher attempts not to stray away from the outlined boundaries. Secondly,

the researcher takes on an analysing role. This means that after the data has been collected, the researcher utilises a qualitative data analysis technique in order to effectively analyse the obtained data so that meaningful conclusions can be drawn. In addition, the researcher adopts the role of consulting co-coders (industrial psychologists) to assist with the analysis of the obtained data. Lastly, the researcher plays an ethical role to ensure that the research study is at all times conducted in an ethical manner.

#### **1.4.3.4 Research participants and sampling method**

With regard to this study, the researcher uses a purposive homogeneous non-probability sampling technique in an attempt to collect valuable, in-depth, and rich data. According to Leedy and Ormrod, (2013) with purposive sampling, individuals are identified and targeted based on the particular purpose of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Purposive homogeneous sampling puts the spotlight on a particular subgroup, thus meaning that the sample members are similar (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

In order to ensure that the research aims are reached, it is crucial to select the most appropriate target group that allows for the provision of in-depth and rich information. For the purpose of this study, the sample is restricted by the following inclusion criteria:

- SAPS employees of the Employee Health and Wellness section working as Psychologists, Social Workers or Chaplains.
- Abovementioned employees who were nominated to attend the specific trauma counselling course by their provincial management.
- A diverse sample from the population is considered in terms of race, gender and qualification.

#### **1.4.3.5 Data collection methods**

Journaling, as a data gathering method is known as interval-contingent recording (Eckenrode & Bolger, 1995; Wheeler & Reis, 1991). Participants use this method to record experiences at regular and predetermined intervals of time (e.g., every evening), as selected by the researcher. Participants are asked to report on the basis of what has occurred since the last recording or on what the participant may be doing or feeling at that moment. Questions such

as “What were your thoughts during your experiences?” “How did the day's experiences make you feel?”, “What made an impact on you today?”, “How will it change your competencies in the future?” are asked to the participants to guide them within the journaling process.

#### **1.4.3.6 Data recording**

Before commencing with the study, permission is obtained from the participants to utilise the journal entries for research purposes. The entries are obtained and photocopied, after which the original journals are returned to the participants. The entries in the journal are transcribed into an excel sheet. The transcribed material is stored safely and confidentially, and backup copies are made of all electronic files.

#### **1.4.3.7 Strategies used to ensure quality data**

Confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability are criteria that are considered as important when specifically focusing on the trustworthiness of the findings, and therefore the researcher adheres to these (Krefting, as cited in Wright, 2014). Confirmability refers to the researcher who stays objective throughout the study and allows the findings to be confirmed by an auditor. The researcher ensures credibility by not allowing any personal opinion or theoretical background to influence the results thereby ensuring that the true experience of the participants is captured. The researcher ensures dependability by reporting on the methodologies followed in each process of the research, thereby ensuring transparency of the research process. Transferability gives an indication of the degree to which the context and data of the current research study can be repeated for other settings and populations. Although it is difficult to generalise findings from a qualitative study since the participants' numbers are usually few, an effort is made by the researcher to describe the context and setting of the study in such a way that a replication of the study is possible for another population or research study.

#### **1.4.3.8 Data analysis**

In the data analysis phase of the research the researcher notices patterns in the data and questions these patterns (Botma, Greef, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2010). The current study uses thematic analyses for the process to obtain patterns and themes from the data. Thematic analyses is a method used in qualitative research to identify patterns, themes and subthemes and provides a qualitative detailed and nuanced account of the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The generic approach suggested by Creswell (2009) to analyse the data is used in this study. Creswell's (2009) approach is a linear, hierarchical approach involving several steps which are interrelated. Firstly the data is organised and prepared by means of transcribing the collected data, and arranging the data into different types (according to the sources of information, e.g. field notes and interviews). Next the researcher obtains a general sense of the transcribed material by reading through the data. Here the researcher obtains an overall view of the participant's views and impressions. The third step involves starting with a coding process by organising the data into categories or segments, or grouping topics together to look for interrelationships. A decision is made regarding the final abbreviation/naming of each category. Next a description step follows, in the case of this study where thematic analyses are used, patterns, themes and subthemes are identified. Themes can be analysed (case studies) or described (phenomenology) in an effort to connect themes with each other. A next step involves the representing of the themes. A narrative passage can be used, or visuals such as tables or figures, or a discussion of interconnected themes. The last step relates to making interpretations from the data, thereby obtaining meaning of the research material. The researcher investigates lessons learned and makes recommendations for future studies based on the findings.

#### **1.4.3.9 Reporting**

In this study, a qualitative reporting style is utilised. Categories, themes and sub-themes are obtained from the journal entries and supported by direct quotes from the participants' journal entries.

#### **1.4.3.10 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are important to consider in any research study. Informed consent is an important ethical consideration since the data could expose the participant. Therefore, the aim of the study is explained to the participants before consent is given by participants. Participants are also reminded that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the research at any given time. Anonymity is ensured to all participants during the research. Another ethical consideration is the organisation wherein the research takes place, therefore the SAPS is approached to obtain approval for the study. The SAPS is informed that this study falls within a research project which has obtained ethical clearance from the university's institutional office.

### 1.5 Overview of chapters

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: Research article.

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

### 1.6 Chapter summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the problem statement and research objectives. Furthermore, the research method was explained, followed by a brief overview of the chapters that will follow.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF COUNSELLORS DURING A TRAUMA COUNSELLING TRAINING PROGRAMME

## ABSTRACT

**Orientation:** This study aims to explore the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme.

**Research purpose:** The general objective of this research is to explore the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme.

**Motivation:** Trauma is a reality any organisation faces, especially so in the SAPS. By evaluating a trauma counselling programme, research results are made available to establish effective ways to address trauma in the workplace.

**Research design, approach and method:** This study entailed a qualitative research design where social constructivism was employed as a paradigm from a phenomenology approach. Trauma counsellors in the SAPS were used as a case study and selected by implementing a purposive homogeneous non-probability sampling technique. The data entailed 12 journals by trauma counsellors in the SAPS.

**Main findings:** The results showed that the training programme was mainly effective to train trauma counsellors. The results revealed four categories relating to the participants' thought and emotion experiences, the impact the experience had on them and lastly the way they experienced their future competence to be influenced. After the training the counsellors showed increased self-awareness, self-insight, and gained insight and understanding of how police officials experience trauma. The findings showed that the participants felt empowered and more confident to assist police officials with their trauma recovery.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Police officials are often confronted with critical incidents with the risk of being traumatised. Not only is the trauma in itself a risk to the officials, but the inherent job stressors police officials have to deal with increases stress and negatively influences their wellbeing. This study contributes to knowledge regarding the management of work-related wellbeing in organisations.

**Contribution/value-add:** The efficiency of a training programme aimed at equipping trauma counsellors is evaluated, thereby knowledge is made available to organisations on how to address trauma by training trauma counsellors in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Trauma, workplace trauma, trauma counselling, trauma training programmes, South African Police Service

## **Introduction**

Employees are often exposed to traumatic incidents in the working environment (McKim & Smith-Adcock, 2014). This is especially true for employees working in the security industry, where traumatic incidents are a daily occurrence as a result of their job demands (Sonnentag, Pundt & Albrecht, 2014). Over the last decade, the security industry, which includes the police service, metro police, national defence force and private security companies, have received much research attention concerning treatment of trauma in the workplace (Bedard, Greif, & Buckley; 2004, Hoffman, 2012). A traumatic event that shocked the world and left a devastating impact on employees that survived were the attacks on the World Trade centre in New York, United States of America on 9 September 2001 (North, *et al.*, 2013). If the aftermath of such a traumatic event is not dealt with appropriately it could impact on surviving employees' productivity and wellness within the working environment (Hoffman, 2012). Recent traumatic events in the South African workplace include the workers who died in a shooting incident at Marikana on 16 August 2012 after a strike went violent (The Times, 2012). More recently four police officials died while assisting at an accident scene, when a truck carrying explosives caught fire and exploded (Daily News, 2014). Workplace trauma involves any event in the occupational environment which negatively affects the employee, resulting in trauma (Hoffman, 2012). Incidents of an occupational traumatic nature include, natural disasters; industrial accidents, human-caused incidents; deaths (including homicide/suicide), work-related accidents, disease-caused, labour and industrial violence, downsizing and layoffs (Hoffman, 2012). Emotional recovery after such traumatic incidents may take longer if not addressed appropriately (North, *et al.*, 2013), and could even lead to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) if left unattended (De Boer, *et al.*, 2013).

### **Research purpose and objectives**

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme. The specific objectives of this research were:

- To determine how trauma and trauma counselling is conceptualised in the literature.
- To determine what the content and methodology is of a trauma counselling training programme in the SAPS.

- To determine the experiences trauma counsellors capture in their journals during the training.
- To determine which recommendations can be made for training trauma counsellors in the SAPS.

## Literature review

### **Defining trauma**

Referring to psychological trauma, Kaminer and Eagle (2010) define trauma as both the stimuli of a traumatic event (a car accident was a trauma in his life) as well as to the reaction to the event (he experienced trauma due to the car accident). Traumatic stress refers to the severity of both the stressor and the response. A considerable minority of individuals experiencing traumatic stress would reach the level where it could be classified as a disorder (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). However in severe cases, the symptoms do not reduce over time and could develop into a disorder, named Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is classified in both the International Classification of category (ICD) 10 published by the World Health Organisation and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual DSM 5 (Tehrani, 2004). Various editions have been published since the first edition of the DSM. The most recent (5<sup>th</sup>) edition has made alterations to the PTSD definition as known over recent years. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2014), PTSD is now included in a separate chapter relating to trauma and stress related disorders. The trigger to PTSD is viewed as actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation (new addition). The exposure must relate to (one or more of the following), the individual directly experienced or witnessed the event, a close family member or friend involved in a traumatic event, experiences first hand or repeated exposure to the aversive details of the traumatic event (however not through the media etc.). The disturbance causes clinical significant distress or impairment to the individual's social interactions, ability to work or other important areas of functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2014).

One of the most stressful and demanding work environments is that of employees within the South African Police Service (Mostert & Rothmann, 2006). Police officials are often exposed in the line of duty to traumatic incidents, also known as critical-incident stressors (Watson,

Jorgensen, Meiring, & Hill, 2012). Potential emotionally challenging situations in this occupation include emotional trauma due to serious motor vehicle accidents in high speed chases, conflict with offenders, and dealing with a difficult organisational climate (Pienaar, Rothmann, & Van de Vijver, 2007). In order for police officials to work through the challenges they are confronted with in their workplace, trauma interventions and counselling are necessary (Bowler *et al.*, 2012).

### **Trauma management in the South African Police Service**

South Africa's police service in particular is an environment where high stressors are experienced which often include traumatic incidents (Minnaar & Mistry, 2006). Police officials are not only faced with their own emotions during traumatic incidents but also those of colleagues and the community affected by these incidents (Chabalala, 2004; Fontaine, 2008). This results in police officials suffering from anxiety, mood disorders and general physical and psychological ill health (Consedine & Magai, 2002; Gray & Heatherington, 2003). Pienaar and Rothmann (2005) indicated that the high suicide rate in the SAPS and high absenteeism rates due to ill-health show the damaging effects the policing environment has on the police official. The 2013 Polmed report on police employee illnesses indicates a high rate of PTSD and the co-morbid disorder of depression as a result of the police official's stressful work environment and should be a concern within the organisation (Friedman, 2009). In order for police officials to cope with their demanding work environment, it is important that these members understand their own emotional reactions towards traumatic incidents (Gumani, Fourie, & Terre Blanch, 2013). The officials should be able to regulate their emotions appropriately in order for them to cope in their unique circumstances (Van Gederen, Konjin, & Bakker, 2011). One way to gain insight into their own emotions is by utilising support from police trauma counsellors (Gumani *et al.*, 2013).

The Disaster Management Act, (57 of 2002) and the SAPS national instruction (18 of 1998) provide the SAPS counsellors with guidelines to assist police officials during major crisis situations or disasters (Watson, Volschenk, Jacobs, & Bhullar, 2013). This policy instructs managers on how to manage and refer police officials who show trauma symptoms. According to Watson *et al.* (2013), traumatic incident refers to:

any situation experienced by an employee that causes him or her to experience unusually

strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with his or her ability to function either at the scene or later. These could include a shooting incident, whether the employee was the victim or a witness; a suicide or attempted suicide incident; a bomb explosion; a gruesome scene, such as a murder scene, serious collision or disaster; or a hostage situation; a case of extreme provocation which may cause frustration or aggression; or any other incident that causes trauma (p. 90).

While a traumatised employee is viewed as “an employee who was present at, or directly affected by, or exposed to, or in any manner experienced a traumatic incident” (p. 90).

### **Trauma counselling**

Tehrani (2004) identifies a range of support that can be provided to an individual following a traumatic incident. The period immediately following a traumatic incident requires crisis management which would typically involve immediate safety and support. Within the next few days an individual might need diffusing which entails the opportunity to talk through the event. Debriefing follows three to ten days after the incident, when the individual is assisted through a structured process to retell the story. Lastly, trauma counselling would involve an approach to assist the individual to treat post-traumatic stress. Typical approaches to trauma counselling involve cognitive behavioural therapy, psychodynamic therapy and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) (Tehrani, 2004).

According to Inter Trauma Nexus (2011) trauma counselling can be viewed as “a brief intervention by a recognised counsellor or facilitator with special training in traumatic stress, aimed at assisting a person to recover from the effects of recent trauma exposure” (p.12).

Trauma counsellors thus typically work with people who are under stress or who are distressed due to trauma experienced in the workplace. Trauma counselling in itself can be a highly stressful activity, and counsellors are by no means immune to stressors (McManus, Winder, & Gordon, 2002; Vawda, 2008). Mitchell’s (1997) approach to trauma intervention relates to the “debriefing” stage as described by Tehrani (2004). Mitchell’s approach involved a focus on returning the victim to an adaptive level of independent functioning. The independent functioning should approximate or exceed the pre-crisis level of adaptation (Everly & Mitchell, 1997; Wollman, 1993).

Early studies show that the foremost areas of development in the sphere of interventions for critical events and critical incidents include: customary individually based crisis intervention paradigms, solitary factor group psychological debriefing approaches of critical incidents and the multicomponent critical incident stress management model (CISM) (Caplan, 1964; Grinker & Spiegel, 1945). In recent years crisis interventions took on a proactive approach (James & Gilliland, 2012). A philosophy of lowering the chances of the trauma having a long-term emotional effect on the victims arose. This was in order to assist victims to return to a state of autonomous healthy functioning, in some cases even exceeding the level of pre-crisis (Everly & Mitchell, 1997; Regel & Joseph, 2010; Wollman, 1993). Literature indicates that much dispute exists regarding the most appropriate tool to assist in crisis interventions, but many researchers agree on the fact that acting as soon as possible after a crisis is paramount (Cukierman, 2011; Jacobson, Strickler, & Morley, 1968).

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) are typical models used as trauma intervention (Mitchell, 1997). The CISM model was initially designed for emergency personnel and was later applied within other work environments by employee assistance professionals (Slawinski, 2006). CISM entails the management process of trauma experiences, and includes a proactive approach towards training managers in trauma symptoms in order to identify employees in need of assistance (Everly, Flannery, & Mitchell, 2000). The model further entails having a stress management programme available on all levels, namely for basic referral as well as for disaster events (Everly & Mitchell, 1997). As a seven-phase process, CISD forms part of the stress management process (CISM) and offers a standardised, structured approach for discussing thoughts and emotions with trained practitioners after a traumatic event (Pack, 2012).

Employees in the SAPS who assist traumatised individuals are referred to as “debriefers”, thereby implying that the intervention phase employed to assist the police official following the incident relies on debriefing. Only psychologists, social workers and chaplains are trained in trauma management in the SAPS (Watson *et al.*, 2013). These personnel typically assist police officers who experienced crises and trauma due to their work environment (McKim & Smith-Adcock, 2014). According to Watson (personal communication, June 28, 2014), in lay-men’s terms, this is known as assisting a traumatised individual from a “safe-to-safe” process. This means taking the person through an intervention process by starting at a safe

place (typically prior to the traumatic incident) and ending off the session at a point where the individual feels safe to close the session. The SAPS trauma management model includes an education phase where managers in the SAPS are trained in identifying the trauma symptoms in order to effectively refer police officials. Apart from the debriefing phase of the management model, police officials are also assisted by means of a counselling or therapeutic process, often trauma related, especially so when PTSD is diagnosed. Thus, for the purposes of this study, *trauma counselling* is used to refer to the trauma intervention management model the SAPS counsellors are trained in.

The SAPS trauma counsellors are trained in a model specifically designed for the policing environment based on the CISM model (Watson, *et al.*, 2013). This seven phase-model, known as the Jacobs-model focuses on a trauma- counselling and management process. The introduction phase is where the importance of confidentiality is being explained as well as the ground rules and the aims of the objectives of the debriefing session. In the fact phase the official is encouraged to share as much factual information concerning the traumatic incident as he/she could remember. The thought phase includes allowing the official to share the thoughts he/she had prior to and during the incident, while the feeling phase focuses on the emotions the official experienced during and after the traumatic incident. The stress reaction and stress management phases focus on informing the police official that the feelings, thoughts and acts they have after the traumatic incident are normal. The last phase focuses on following up, observing the official and ensuring he/she has friends and family members in place to talk to whenever needed. The counsellors are further trained in micro counselling skills, group dynamics, knowledge on stress, crises and trauma, PTSD and the CISM model during the training programme (Watson *et al.*, 2013). This model is viewed as effective within the policing environment and can be applied within a multi-cultural organisation (Maabela, 2011).

### **Trauma training methodology**

Literature provides various strategies for training counsellors through behavioural strategies (Beidas & Kendall, 2010; Martino, 2010). These strategies include distance learning methods (Shafer, Rhode, & Chong, 2004), skill-building workshops (Walters, Matson, Baer, & Ziedonis, 2005), and competency-based supervision (Falender & Shafranske, 2007). Literature indicates that there are various teaching strategies such as lecturing, role playing,

and experiential learning available to train counsellors (Malott, Paone, Maddux, & Rothma, 2010). Robitschek (1998) indicates that experiential learning is often used as training methodology for counsellors. During this training, trainees differentiate between cognitive learning theories which tend to emphasise cognition over affect, and behavioural learning theories that deny any role for subjective experience in the learning process (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), learning is a holistic process of receiving information and adapting to the world. Experiential learning is thus a learning strategy where individuals “learn from experience” holistically (Dewey, 1938). Experiential learning is used as training method within the SAPS to train trauma counsellors (Gumani *et al.*, 2013).

Trauma counselling training in the SAPS is provided at a SAPS training venue. This venue is situated in a remote area in the bushveld (Watson, 2014, personal communication, June 13, 2014). This type of training strategy relates to the “wilderness therapy” concept (Crisp, 1998). With wilderness therapy a therapeutic wilderness milieu refers to an isolated camp with minimal equipment. The outcomes of such therapy is dependent on the clients’ physical orientation, the clients’ ability to reflect, having an environmental awareness, the composition of the group, understanding of a group process and having some educational success (Crisp, 1998).

SAPS trauma counsellors are encouraged during their training to record their emotional experiences in a journal (Watson *et al.*, 2013). Literature indicates that journaling is commonly used for training counsellors (Dwyer, Piquette, Buckle, & McCaslin, 2013). Experience sampling, daily diaries, interaction records, momentary sampling, and real-time data capture all refer to a class of methodologies for examining everyday experience known broadly as journaling (see Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). According to Ulrich and Lutgendorf (2002), writing about personal experiences can be associated in improving mental and physical health. In addition when mastering journaling, trauma-related emotion is expressed and enhances feelings of control and mastery over the traumatic event (Ulrich & Lutgendorf, 2002).

From the aforementioned it seems clear that it is important for police officials to receive trauma counselling in their line of duty. SAPS trauma counsellors are trained in a specific

model in order to assist traumatised police officials. The trauma counsellors are trained by means of experiential learning, where journaling is utilised to capture personal experiences during the training.

Next, the methodology used to address the objectives of this study is presented.

## **Research design**

### Research approach

This research was a qualitative study from a social constructivism paradigm utilising a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the processes and the social and cultural contexts which shape various behavioural patterns (Wagner, Kwulich, & Garner, 2012). Qualitative research provides richness and depth of data and can be conducted in a variety of research approaches. The current study used the social constructivism paradigm, and by using this paradigm the researcher is interested in understanding the world as others see it (Wagner, *et al.*, 2012). The ontology of this paradigm includes many different intangible realities as people exist. The reality depends on the persons' own mind, and is therefore a personal or social construct (Wagner, *et al.*, 2012). According to Creswell (2009) reality in this sense is limited to context, space, time and individuals or a group in a given situation and cannot be generalised into common reality. Concerning the epistemology, constructivists argue that knowledge is subjective, since it is socially constructed and truth lies within the person's experience (Wagner, *et al.*, 2012).

A phenomenological research approach was further utilised in this study. This approach focuses on the meaning that certain lived experiences hold for participants and is aimed to determine the meaning of the experience to the participant, and not necessarily to provide an explanation for the experience (Flood, 2010; Wagner, *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this specific study focused on the lived experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme.

## Research strategy

A case study is used as a research strategy. A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (Yin, 2014). According to Stake (1995), the more the object of the study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the usefulness of the epistemological rationales, and the better the case study. As this study is an experiential learning study, a case study is the most fitting research strategy because it facilitates the conveying of experiences, as well as the experience of studying the case (Stake, 1995). The unit of analyses for the sample is restricted to trauma counsellors who are qualified psychologists (all categories of registration), social workers and chaplains employed within the SAPS and nominated to attend the trauma counselling training.

## Research method

The research method consists of the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, research procedure, data collection methods, data recording, strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity, ethical considerations, data analysis, and reporting style.

## **Research setting**

A SAPS training venue acted as a research setting for this study. The venue of the training is in a remote bushveld area, with no electricity or cellular reception. In the police service the trauma counsellors are trained in a specific training programme during a nine day programme. The training includes different training methodologies both in and outside the class room setting. On the first day, after arriving at the training facility and attending a general orientation session, the participants were taken into the bushveld and left individually for a period of self-reflection (solo-exercise). On the second day the participants were divided into groups and instructed to blind-fold a group member and guide this person down the hill safely (blind-folded exercise) followed by another time for self-reflection (solo-exercise). A major part of the second day was spent using experiential learning-based exercises, such as rope-exercises and group exercises. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> days skills training was received by means of lecturing, self-study and read-and-do methods. Several individual as well as group assignments were completed as well as a skills test. During the theoretical training, role-play

sessions were used continuously to practise the skills and trauma-model. Between the fifth and the eighth day four simulation exercises were presented, which entailed a re-enacted traumatic incident where the participants had to work together as a team to reach a common goal (safety). On the second last day the participants completed a practical examination where they have to counsel a traumatised individual or group (role-play). An average of 70% for all the assignments and examination had to be obtained to successfully complete the training programme. On the last day the internship period was discussed and the training concluded.

The trainee counsellors were SAPS employees, namely the psychologists (all categories of registration), social workers and chaplains. Trained SAPS facilitators provided the training to the trauma counsellors and ensured that the environment was conducive for training.

### **Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

Access to the participants was gained by joining an established research team at the university who are investigating trauma and the emotional experiences of SAPS employees. The researcher joined the project team and was invited to take part in research concerning the trauma counselling training course. The research falls within an established research project with ethical clearance from both the university and the SAPS (refer to Appendix A). In order to conduct the research, the researcher had to assume various roles. Firstly the research was planned as part of the project team. Proper planning was done to ensure that the specific objectives of the study would be addressed. This included selecting a suitable sample for the population, planning the training programme as part of the research team and ensuring that the content (data) would be gathered effectively. Secondly, the researcher assumed the role of analyst by analysing the data utilising content analysis. To ensure that the data analysis would be done effectively, co-coders (registered Industrial Psychologists) were consulted, thereby the researcher also assumed the role of consultant. Lastly, the researcher assumed an ethical role to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner.

### **Research Participants and sampling method**

In this study a purposive homogeneous non-probability sampling technique was utilised, where participants were identified based on the particular purpose of the study (trauma

counsellors in the SAPS attending a specific training programme) (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2005). Purposive sampling is composed of participants with particular characteristics that are of interest for the study, and that will best enable the researcher to receive the best possible information to draw conclusions (De Vos, *et al.*, 2005). In this study, the participants form part of a particular subgroup, thus meaning that the sample members were similar (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The sample consisted of participants ( $N = 12$ ) who were trained as trauma counsellors in the SAPS. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

*Characteristics of participants (N=12)*

| Item          | Category      | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender        | Female        | 7         | 58%        |
|               | Male          | 5         | 42%        |
| Race          | Black         | 10        | 83%        |
|               | White         | 2         | 17%        |
| Qualification | Psychologist  | 4         | 33%        |
|               | Social Worker | 5         | 42%        |
|               | Chaplain      | 3         | 25%        |
| Province      | Gauteng       | 7         | 58%        |
|               | Mpumalanga    | 2         | 17%        |
|               | Limpopo       | 3         | 25%        |

According to Table 1 the sample was comprised of 12 counsellors from whom most of the participants were female (58%). Participants were mostly black (83%) and qualified as a social worker (42%). Participants who attended the trauma counselling training programme mostly resided in the Gauteng province (58%) while 25% of the participants came from Limpopo and 17% from Mpumalanga province.

### **Data collection methods**

The data was collected by means of personal journal entries that participants made during the training programme. Journaling is known as interval-contingent recording. In this study the participants recorded their experiences at regular and predetermined time intervals (e.g. every evening), as selected by the researcher (see Eckenrode & Bolger, 1995; Wheeler & Reis, 1991). The trauma counselling training programme consisted of nine days where the

participants were encouraged to make journal entries of their experiences of each day's activities. The journals entries can be viewed as primary documents which refer to materials which are written by the participants of the study (Wagner, *et al.*, 2012). This type of data collection method is viewed as reliable; however it has to be seen in the social context in which it was written (Wagner, *et al.*, 2012). The journal entries were guided by four questions relating to the participants' experiences, namely:

1. *What were your thoughts during today's experience?*
2. *How did the day's experiences make your feel?*
3. *What made an impact on you today?*
4. *How will today's experience change your competencies in the future?*

### **Recording of data**

Permission and informed consent was obtained from the participants to use their journal entries by explaining the purpose of the study beforehand. Copies of the journal entries were obtained after the training was concluded. The researcher transcribed the journal entries into an Excel spread sheet. Once all the journal entries were transcribed, the researcher compared the transcripts with each journal entry to insure that no information was overlooked. The data was stored safely and confidentially, inaccessible to others, and backup copies were made of all electronic files. Participants also completed a biographical information sheet containing information such as gender, race, qualification and province.

### **Data analysis**

A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and obtain patterns and themes. Thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative research to identify patterns, themes and subthemes and provides a qualitative detailed and nuanced account of the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The generic method presented by Creswell to analyse the data was used in this study. The following steps were used to code the data (Creswell, 2009):

- Step 1: The researcher organised and prepared the data for data analysis by means of transcribing the journal entries manually into an Excel sheet.

- Step 2: The researcher familiarised herself with the data by reading through the entire set of transcribed material. This is done in order to have a general sense of understanding regarding the participants' views and perceptions on the trauma counselling training programme as a whole.
- Step 3: The researcher made use of a coding process. The data was organised into categories, and the categories were named according to the four questions provided to the participants for their journal entries.
- Step 4: The categories, themes and sub-themes of the data were described. Two co-coders were consulted to ensure that the coding process was valid.
- Step 5: The researcher decided on the manner in which the findings of the data were presented. Both sub-themes and quotes were used in order to describe the categories and themes of the data.
- Step 6: The researcher made inferences regarding the data. The researcher reported the findings of the study and enforced the findings by making use of appropriate and relevant literature.

### **Strategies used to ensure quality data**

Trustworthiness is an important element to ensure the validity of any research study. According to Krefting (as cited in Wright, 2014), the elements of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to the researcher's acceptable skills and knowledge to perform the research. Aspects that address credibility involve the use of triangulation, rigor and the amount of time spent in the data collections phase. Documentation provided by verbatim transcripts is a method to establish the study's credibility (and can be made available). In order to ensure that credibility was reached; the researcher described the context of the trauma counselling training programme and how the data was collected. The researcher consulted co-researchers to evaluate whether the research was conducted according to best practices, and to ensure that conclusions correlated with the findings.

According to Krefting (as cited in Wright, 2014), transferability presents the manner in how the repeating of the study by other researchers in other venues is possible. By providing a detailed description of the study's participants, the research method and data analysis

procedure are ways to ensure transferability of the study. Dependability relates to the whether the same study can be repeated. By making the raw data and coding method available, the dependability of the study was ensured. The research process was well documented by a description of the research methodology. Confirmability describes how the data and findings can be substantiated by others. This was ensured by utilising co-coders during the analysis to ensure that the data was interpreted correctly. Another step involves consulting an expert in the field as an auditor. This was done by consulting a SAPS psychologist who forms part of the training programme as trainer to check the accuracy of the data and the researchers' conclusions.

### **Ethical considerations**

According to Botma, Greef, Muladi and Wright (2010), the ethical principles and codes should be known when conducting research amongst human beings. The researcher ensured that the ethical codes as published by the Health Professions Council of South Africa and the Society for Industrial Psychology (SIOPSA) were adhered to at all times. Prior to commencing with the study the researcher obtained ethical approval from the tertiary institutes' ethical committee. Since the study falls within a larger project where an ethical clearance number was obtained, this was submitted as part of the research proposal. It was also important to approach the SAPS management to obtain approval for the research (Appendix A). The researcher was well aware that the participants were particularly vulnerable since they submitted their personal journal entries for research purposes. Therefore it was important to ensure that the participants were aware that participation in the study was voluntary and that anonymity was ensured for all participants during the research.

### **Reporting**

In this study, a qualitative style was utilised to report on the research findings. The themes and sub-themes deduced from the journal entries were provided in table format. Direct entries from participants were utilised in order to substantiate the findings of the research, which is described next.

## Findings

The results of the journal entries made over the nine days' training were analysed and are reported next. Four questions were presented in order to guide participants in the journaling process; the results are arranged into four categories based on these questions. Themes, and sub-themes, along with the quotations to support the findings are provided.

The findings are provided in the following order:

Table 2: Thoughts regarding counsellor's experiences

Table 3: Emotion experiences of counsellors

Table 4: Impact of daily experiences on counsellors

Table 5: The future competencies of counsellors

### Category 1: Thoughts regarding trauma counsellor's experiences

The findings of Category 1 were obtained by analysing the results of journal entries made by the participants regarding the *thoughts* they experienced during the training. Table 2 collectively gives an indication of the counsellors' thoughts regarding their experience. The most descriptive responses by participants are provided in order to substantiate the particular findings in this category.

Table 2

#### *Thoughts regarding counsellor's experiences*

| Theme        | Sub-theme                   | Response   |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Appreciation | Appreciation of experiences | "I was thinking how angry and sad I was on my way to (training venue) and now it's the opposite"   |
|              |                             | "I was thinking that we are leaving. I have to go back to my office. I was happy with this group. We had to say goodbye to each other soon." |
|              | Appreciation of privileges  | "...I stayed to appreciate and think of what I have and have left behind."   |
|              |                             | "I was thinking about the privilege to have made so many new friends and to socialise with them around the fire."                            |

Table 2 Continues

|                                    |                                |  |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Concerns regarding training</b> | Uncertainties                  | <p><i>"...so it was good that we were given a chance to ask questions."</i></p> <p><i>"The questions and answer session gave us a clear picture on what to do."</i></p>  |
|                                    | Facilitators                   | <p><i>"I was thinking about the facilitator's response/feedback towards the assignment."</i></p> <p><i>"(Although it also came to my mind that the environment was safe), the facilitators would never try to harm us."</i></p>  |
|                                    | Fellow counsellors             | <p><i>"Whether the person leading me will be able to lead me. How can we do as a team to complete our assignments?"</i></p> <p><i>"I was hoping I would get along with my roommates. I thought I would never be able to remember everybody's names."</i></p>   |
|                                    | Safety/survival                | <p><i>"It was shocking for me to be left there in the dark not knowing whether you are safe or not."</i></p> <p><i>"Whether our transport will be able to take us safe, because the taxi was not looking good."</i></p> <p><i>"...lot of things came into my mind like being bitten by the snakes and other wild animals."</i></p>             |
|                                    | Training content               | <p><i>"Will I be able to retain all this knowledge?"</i></p> <p><i>"I was thinking that I hope that I pass the test, but I was also reassuring myself that I studied enough."</i></p> <p><i>"I was thinking that will I be able to complete those exercises on time?"</i></p> <p><i>"...confident of knowing the content of the test."</i></p> |
|                                    | Venue/Training environment     | <p><i>"...I was thinking when we would arrive what it would look like how it would be like at the venue. Unsure, not sure if the environment would be something I like."</i></p> <p><i>"...I thought the surroundings in the bush was very beautiful and was thinking about how peaceful it was to relax alone in the bush."</i></p>           |
| <b>Group membership</b>            | Importance of group membership | <p><i>"During the games I just told myself that I must give my part in order for our team to win."</i></p> <p><i>"...I could see that I can share and work with other people and if we work as a team we can make it."</i></p>   |
| <b>Self</b>                        | Physical capacity              | <p><i>"Am I fit enough to balance and jump and even to run? Am I fit enough to climb stones to the top and confidence to the teamwork."</i></p> <p><i>"I am going to feel tired the whole day."</i></p>  |
|                                    | Revealing self                 | <p><i>"... Will I be able to tell the group about myself?"</i></p> <p><i>"Vulnerable - opening up to people... what will be the responses from people be, will they judge or accept me as I am?"</i></p>   |

Table 2 Continues

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Past experiences          | <p><i>"...grief of my mom who passed away three months ago is still not yet over."</i></p>  |
|                           | <p><i>"...of what happened in the past, about one of my family members who committed suicide."</i></p>  |
|                           | <p><i>"...think about my life and how I should change certain things for the better."</i></p>   |
| <b>Theory application</b> | <p>Insight into experiences of trauma counselee</p> <p><i>"...insight in things that I should consider when dealing with a person who has been traumatised."</i></p>  |
|                           | <p><i>"...I am having a lot of responsibility. Mostly to deal with a person who has PTSD, Posttraumatic stress disorder."</i></p>   |
|                           | <p><i>"The reality of what police officials are going through reflected on my mind. I was frighten and imagined what about them. That on its own has given me the picture and has taught me that I need to understand why they are acting sometimes in weird ways..."</i></p> |
| Application               | <p><i>"...the valuable impact these skills were going to have on my future intervention with others."</i></p>   |
|                           | <p><i>"I wonder if I will be able to handle a big group of traumatised people in real life."</i></p>  |
|                           | <p><i>"I was thinking about all the new information I was receiving and how I could apply it."</i></p>  |

From Table 2 the thoughts pertaining to the participants' experiences during the training programme included five main themes:

**Appreciation:** The participants journaled about their appreciation for the opportunity to take part in the trauma counselling training programme (appreciation of experiences). They also thought about their privileges (appreciation of privileges) in everyday life, the opportunity to make new friends and colleagues during the trauma counselling training programme, as well as the privilege of being a trauma counsellor.

**Concerns regarding training:** Journal entries about several concerns the participants had thought about during the training was noted. Firstly, the results showed that the participants experienced uncertainties, they did not know what to expect of the trauma counselling training programme which was clarified in a question and answer (Q & A) session.

Another concern that was journaled related to the facilitators (concern regarding facilitators). Some of the participants felt unsure of the feedback they received via the trauma counselling

programme's facilitators. Since the participants did not know each other, concerns were raised among the group if they will for instance work together as a group, will be able to share their life experience with each other and if they will be able to trust each other (concern regarding fellow counsellors).

Concern regarding safety/survival: The majority of the participants thought of their safety, as it was dark and some participants felt unsafe. During the blindfolding exercise some of the participants felt concerns for their safety and they were unsure whether their fellow group members would lead them safely down the hill while being blindfolded. During the solo exercise where participants were dropped off in the bushveld during the night, participants had thoughts about their safety, as the bushveld is unknown to them, and they did not know where they were. Some participants thought about their safety regarding wild animals. Another concern was their safety travelling to the training venue, regarding the condition of the vehicles they had to travel with.

The participants showed concerns regarding the content of the training, the training material and training exercises. They were concerned whether they would be able to use the information received during the training programme in a correct way. Participants were also concerned about whether they would remember the phases of the counselling model in order to pass the test which forms part of the trauma counselling training course. Other participants felt confident regarding the content of the training.

Training environment: As the venue where the trauma counselling training programme was being held did not have any electricity or cell phone coverage, some participants had concerns regarding the training environment. While others' appreciated the environment and the outdoor experience.

Group membership: Some of the participants realised the importance of playing a part in the group and giving their best (importance of group membership). They realised that each member is needed in order to reach the goal which is set. Thoughts of relying on fellow group members' came across some of the participants minds. They realised that they needed each other in order to achieve the set goal.

Self: Concern was raised among participants whether they would be able to complete the physical exercises. Participants were also concerned that they would feel tired during the day's exercises (concern regarding physical capacity). Another significant subtheme, concern regarding revealing self, related to the participants not finding it easy to reveal themselves to others'. Some participants felt nervous about the idea of revealing themselves, as well as nervous that fellow participants would judge them for who they are.

Some of the participants were aware of unresolved trauma they experienced regarding the loss of a family member (past experiences). They were also reminded again about traumatic incidents which happened in their family. The participants indicated that they reflected on past experiences, whether positive or negative.

From the findings it is clear that the participants had time for introspection, which led to the realisation that they have come to know their strengths and weaknesses according to the feedback they received (change and growth).

Theory application: The participants indicated that they realised and understood the extent of trauma which their clients or police officials go through (insight into experiences of trauma counselee). It seems that the participants thought about their responsibility in assisting their clients with traumatic experiences.

The participants indicated in their journals that they thought that the programme helped them to link the theory with the practical side of trauma counselling. According to some of the participants, they gained valuable practical knowledge on how to debrief a counselee. They thought about how the trauma counselling training course added value to their skills and understood the value and importance of helping others with trauma counselling.

## **Category 2: Emotion experiences of counsellors**

The findings of Category 2 were obtained by analysing the results of the journal entries the counsellors made regarding the *emotion experiences* they had during the nine day training period and are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

*Emotion experiences of counsellors*

| Theme  | Sub-theme   | Response  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Blind folded exercise</b>   | Fear  | <i>"Fear that I might fall and hurt myself when we are led down to the river or stream."</i>                              |
|  |   | <i>"Am I going to reach the bottom of the hill safely?"</i>   |
| <b>Overall</b>   | Acceptance  | <i>"It made me realise how important it is to consider other people's emotions and try not to be judgmental on them."</i> |
|  |   | <i>"I was more acceptable towards other cultures and their beliefs."</i>  |
|  | Afraid  | <i>"At first I felt afraid..."</i>  |
|  |   | <i>"I was afraid, as I was waiting for the course for 21 months."</i>   |
|  | Alone   | <i>"It made me feel alone..."</i>   |
|  |   | <i>"Vulnerable, alone, isolated."</i>   |
|  | Anxious   | <i>"I was anxious..."</i>   |
|  |   | <i>"I was feeling anxious at the beginning of the day..."</i>   |
|  | Belonging   | <i>"I felt that I had bonded with my group members. Physically barriers of being uncomfortable where broken..."</i>       |
|  |   | <i>"It made me feel alone but the team helped me to get back on track and I appreciated their help."</i>                  |
|  | Comfortable   | <i>"I was feeling comfortable..."</i>   |
|  |   | <i>"Very at ease."</i>  |
|  | Confidence  | <i>"Feeling confident."</i>   |
|  |   | <i>"...and confident as my facilitator has informed me..."</i>  |
|  | Curious   | <i>"Wondering/curiosity: thinking when we would arrive what it would look like how it would be like at the venue."</i>    |
| <i>"I was also curious and looking forward to this course as I waited for it 21 months."</i> |   |   |
| Determined   | <i>"Determined that I could debrief."</i>   |   |
|  | <i>"...self-determination plays an important role..."</i>                                       |   |
| Downhearted  | <i>"Longing for home and down."</i>   |   |
|  | <i>"My feelings were a bit down because of the experience..."</i>                               |   |
| Empathy  | <i>"They also have families to live for. My experience makes me empathise with them."</i>       |   |
|  | <i>"It made me empathise with blind people and realise how they need our support."</i>          |   |
| Empowered  | <i>"I felt very strong and empowered and that I can be able to do the trauma debriefing..."</i> |   |
|  | <i>"Empowered and enjoyed every minute of it..."</i>  |   |
| Excited  | <i>"I felt excited about the information that is valuable and useful."</i>                      |   |
|  | <i>"Was excited that I am getting valuable information that will help me in my duties."</i>     |   |
| Fear   |   | <i>"I felt fearful."</i>  |
|  |   |   |

Table 3 Continues

|                  |                  |   |
|------------------|------------------|---|
|                  |                  | <i>"...fear of unknown..."</i>  |
|                  | Good             | <i>"It made me feel very good and..."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"I felt good after learning the models of trauma debriefing..."</i>  |
|                  | Longing          | <i>"I'd rather be at home, relaxing on the Friday evening, with my husband."</i>  |
|                  | Nervous          | <i>"I am nervous but have to do it well."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"Nervous."</i>   |
|                  | Positive         | <i>"Feel very much positive..."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"Feel more positive and optimistic."</i>   |
|                  | Pressured        | <i>"I felt so under pressure."</i>  |
|                  |                  | <i>"I felt I had to pass and not disappoint my province."</i>   |
|                  | Proud            | <i>"I was impressed and proud of having grasped the information."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"Very proud of myself."</i>  |
|                  | Relaxed          | <i>"...after everything I was relaxed."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"I felt relaxed afterwards."</i>   |
|                  | Relieved         | <i>"...relieved afterwards."</i>  |
|                  |                  | <i>"...but I now feel relieved that everything is out."</i>   |
|                  | Stressed         | <i>"I was really stressing."</i>  |
|                  |                  | <i>"...my palms were sweating as I thought I will black out."</i>   |
|                  | Tired            | <i>"I was tired as I slept late."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"I was also tired because the theory was lot to grasp in at the same time."</i>                                      |
|                  | Uncertain        | <i>"Unsure: Not sure if the environment would be something I like."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"...I was very uncertain of what to expect."</i>   |
|                  | Vulnerable       | <i>"Vulnerable, opening up to people was not easy."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"Vulnerable."</i>  |
| <b>Role play</b> | Anxious          | <i>"...anxious when it was my turn to be the debriefer (in the role play)..."</i>                                       |
|                  |                  | <i>"I was anxious and nervous about the role plays."</i>  |
|                  | Calm             | <i>"...but I needed to be calm because I was going to debrief some member."</i>   |
|                  | Happy/relieved   | <i>"It was fruitful and educational with debriefing steps. I feel happy..."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"I am done with the role play; the experience I went through made me feel relieved."</i>                             |
|                  | Nervous          | <i>"...to get done with my practical's as I was too nervous."</i>   |
|                  |                  | <i>"...and nervous in the beginning of the role play."</i>  |
| <b>Scenario</b>  | Scared/ shocked  | <i>"...shocked - because that was the real thing that our members came across."</i>                                     |
|                  |                  | <i>"Although it (the scenario) was not a real thing but I felt so scared and shocked about both trauma experience."</i> |
| <b>Test</b>      | Anxious/ nervous | <i>"I was anxious about the test."</i>  |
|                  |                  | <i>"I was nervous about studying for the test."</i>   |
|                  | Happy/relieved   | <i>"I felt happy and relieved after I finished with the test."</i>  |
|                  |                  | <i>"...relieved after I finished with the test."</i>  |
|                  |                  | <i>"I was glad the test and debriefing were over. Relieved."</i>  |

Table 3 Continues

|                      |           |   |
|----------------------|-----------|---|
| <b>Solo exercise</b> | Confident | <p><i>“...believe in myself because of the experiences I gain during the solo exercise training.”</i></p> <p><i>“Confident in myself towards the end of the solo exercise.”</i></p> |
|----------------------|-----------|---|

Table 3 describes the emotional experiences of the participants; they made journal entries at various intervals during the exercises, such as prior, during and after the exercises, resulting in different emotion experiences.

Blindfolding exercise: Most of the participants experienced fear during the blindfolding exercise as the group members had to lead one another blindfolded down the hill.

Overall training experience: Relating to emotions referred in general to the overall training experience, participants reported emotions such as feeling afraid, nervous, unsure and anxious prior to the training, also a sense of curiosity and excitement of what to expect during the training. During the training a different variety of emotions were noted in the journals, some participants felt alone and a feeling of longing at stages, while other participants felt a sense of belonging, confidence and determination. The participants also reported that they longed for their love ones and home. They journaled emotions of empathy for their clients, feeling empowered with the new knowledge and positive during the training. Negative feelings included feeling fear of the unknown, pressured to perform, stressed, vulnerability to fellow counsellors and tired from the intensity of the programme and a lack of sleep. On the last day of the trauma counselling training programme, participants reported emotions such as calmness, comfort and feeling relieved.

From Table 3 another theme where emotions were identified was the role-play exercise: the participants reported prior to the role-play exercise that they experienced being anxious, nervous and some participants felt calm before doing the role play. During the role-play exercise it seemed that most of the participant felt anxious, while afterwards they experienced emotions such as happy, relieved and relaxed.

Test: Prior to the test the majority of participants reported feelings of anxiety as they did not know what to expect, while they mostly felt happy, relaxed and relieved after the test.

Scenario experience: It seems that the scenario exercise was initially experienced as rather traumatising to the participants. Feelings such as being scared and shocked were reported. Participants however indicated that going through this experience made them feel more self-confident.

Apart from emotion experiences reported on in Table 3, the counsellors noted numerous different emotions in their journals relating to the training overall. These words were reported with one-word emotions, e.g. “afraid”. A list of these emotions is reported in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1  
*List of emotions*

| Emotion words |            |             |
|---------------|------------|-------------|
| Afraid        | Helpless   | Overwhelmed |
| Angry         | Hopeless   | Panic       |
| Calm          | Interested | Relaxed     |
| Confused      | Irritated  | Sad         |
| Disappointed  | Joy        | Scared      |
| Happy         | Motivated  | Worried     |
| Uncomfortable |            |             |

### Category 3: Impact of daily experiences on counsellors

The findings of Category 3 were obtained by asking participants to journal about the daily impact of the training programme on them. The data showed that the impact of the training programme can be clustered into six themes; Table 4 collectively gives an indication on what specifically made an impact on the participants during each day as extracted from the data analyses. The most descriptive responses by participants are provided in order to substantiate the particular findings in this category.

Table 4  
*Impact of daily experiences on counsellors*

| Theme       | Sub-theme | Response  |
|-------------|-----------|---|
| Environment | Calming   | “...environment itself has an impact on our calmness.”<br>“The environment is an environment that is highly calming.” |

Table 4 Continues

|                                       |                      |   |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
|                                       | More alert           | <p><i>"...made me aware of my senses and surroundings. I was able to hear better, see better in the dark."</i></p> <p><i>"Be alert because anything can happen at any time."</i></p>  |
|                                       | Nature               | <p><i>"...having time alone to think about the day's events and experience nature."</i></p> <p><i>"The nature the quietness no noise..."</i></p>  |
| <b>Importance of group membership</b> | Group cohesion       | <p><i>"...it made me realise that at times we must stick together even if you don't win."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm amazed at how good we as a team worked together doing the exercises."</i></p>  |
|                                       | Listening            | <p><i>"...good communication, listen and..."</i></p> <p><i>Working together listening to each other and..."</i></p>   |
|                                       | Reaching mutual goal | <p><i>"The way we worked as a team to achieve tasks where we had more fun and being competitive and making sure that the task at hand is achieved."</i></p> <p><i>"To be able to take part with the group. To work together in a group for the assignment."</i></p> |
|                                       | Sharing experiences  | <p><i>"Talking about experience and emotions. Talking about myself to the group without fearing."</i></p> <p><i>"At the end everything went well, because I learned more from the group member's experiences in my group."</i></p>                                  |
|                                       | Support              | <p><i>"The support from the group members..."</i></p> <p><i>"The support that one gets from group members made a huge difference."</i></p>  |
|                                       | Trust                | <p><i>"...and trusting of each other."</i></p> <p><i>"...fact that I had to trust someone to lead me blind folded down the mountain."</i></p>   |
| <b>Opportunity to reflect</b>         | Emotions             | <p><i>"I had time to reflect on my feelings thoughts and emotions."</i></p> <p><i>"...and be aware of my own feelings."</i></p>   |
|                                       | Past experiences     | <p><i>"I had enough time to reflect back on my past experiences."</i></p> <p><i>"Thinking about past experiences that I had no control over and accepting them as they are."</i></p>  |
|                                       | Self-insight         | <p><i>"...it gave me time to do introspection and to understand myself more openly."</i></p> <p><i>"I pick up the things that I didn't know about myself. Will I be strong enough to make decisions that will benefit me in future?"</i></p>                        |
|                                       | Sharing experiences  | <p><i>"Listening to people's life story made me realise that most of us share the same life history which was difficult. You may think that you are the only one having problems but others are in the same boat."</i></p>  |

Table 4 Continues

|                                    |                               |   |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
|                                    |                               | <i>"It made me realise that I was not the only person who had problems in my life and actually made me strong and encouraged me to learn about other people's difficulties. It made me realise how small my problem was when hearing other people's stories."</i> |
| <b>Realising own capabilities</b>  | Ability to cope               | <i>"I've realised that I'm strong and capable of anything, nothing in life that I can't do. Also realised that when I come across with obstacles in life I have to face them, not run away so that I could overcome them."</i>                                    |
|                                    |                               | <i>"That I was able to retain most of the information given to me."</i>   |
|                                    | Counselling skills            | <i>"Types of listening, in a person-centred way. Observing body language for you to get clarity. Funnelling. Giving and receiving feedback. Importance of empathy, acceptance, realness and reflection."</i>  |
|                                    |                               | <i>"To learn about listening, questioning and debriefing as a whole."</i>   |
|                                    | Equipped with skills          | <i>"The knowledge I gained and skills have worked for me."</i>  |
|                                    |                               | <i>"Determined and full of joy even though I was stressed up. Equipped."</i>  |
|                                    | Feedback received             | <i>"The positive feedback that I've received from my facilitator..."</i>  |
|                                    |                               | <i>"The feedback I got from my facilitator was positive."</i>   |
|                                    | Overcome fear                 | <i>"...realised that when I come across with obstacles in life, I can do it with no fear."</i>  |
|                                    |                               | <i>"Being able to conduct the session without fear."</i>  |
|                                    | Physical ability              | <i>"I was very tired and less concentration."</i>   |
|                                    |                               | <i>"Going down and up the hill made a wakeup call to regular exercise."</i>   |
|                                    | Strong                        | <i>"How strong I am to make decisions that will benefit me in future."</i>  |
|                                    |                               | <i>"I've realised that I do have capabilities and strengths."</i>   |
|                                    | Trauma counselling approaches | <i>"Gaining some knowledge on how to handle a traumatic person."</i>  |
|                                    |                               | <i>"The phases of trauma debriefing. They explain clearly how to conduct a trauma debriefing session."</i>  |
| <b>Spirituality/religion</b>       | Devotion service              | <i>"The devotion service was good."</i>   |
|                                    |                               | <i>"We had a good service (devotion) which made a good impact on me."</i>   |
| <b>Value of trauma counselling</b> | Empathy                       | <i>"Now I have a clear understanding of how police officials will be feeling after the incidents."</i>  |
|                                    |                               | <i>"For now I know exactly what police official experiences, their feelings and emotions."</i>  |

Table 4 Continues

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Trauma counselling approaches | <i>"Knowing the PTSD and its symptoms."</i>  |
|                               | <i>"I get insight on formal debriefing and am educated on stages of debriefing."</i> |

Table 4 describes aspects that made an impact on each participant daily. The following themes and subthemes emerged:

**Environment:** The environment reportedly made an impact on the participants, as it made them feel calm and made their senses more alert. Participants also indicated that being in nature, with the absence of noise, enabled them to think.

**Importance of group membership:** According to the majority of participants the importance of group membership made an impact on them. Sub-themes such as group cohesion, listening, reaching mutual goals, sharing experiences, support and trust indicate that belonging to a group made an impact on the participants. Although the majority of the participants experienced the importance of group membership in a positive way, there were participants who experienced a lack of group cohesion.

**Opportunity to reflect:** The opportunity to reflect on emotions, past experiences and self-insight made an impact on participants. By sharing experiences, participants also realised that having personal problems are not unique.

**Realising own capabilities:** Participants indicated in the results that they became more aware of their own capabilities, such as being able to cope with life's obstacles and overcome them, and to be able to retain the information which was given. To be able to use the counselling skills that were taught in a constructive manner and to apply it in future counselling sessions made an impact on participants. Being equipped with skills made an impact on participants regarding the abilities that they had gained in trauma counselling. The feedback received from facilitators made a positive impact on participants.

It seems from the data that various participants overcame their fear regarding life's obstacles. The awareness of their physical ability made an impact on the participants; some participants

realised that they need to be more physically active, and others felt tired and experienced a lack of concentration during the training. According to the data, some participants felt strong to make decisions which will benefit them in the future which made an impact on them. The last ability that emerged from the data was the ability to understand a variety of trauma counselling approaches. The participants indicated that they knew how to approach someone with trauma and how to conduct a debriefing session.

Spirituality/religion: Another sub-theme which emerged related to spirituality/religion. Some participants valued the devotion service during the training programme in a positive way.

Value of trauma counselling: The ability to have empathy and learning about various trauma counselling approaches made an impact on the participants.

#### **Category 4: The future competence of efficiency of counsellors**

The findings of Category 4 were obtained by encouraging participants to write in their journals about how they view their future competencies. The data showed a variety of competencies that each participant acknowledged. Since the results showed a list of competencies, the researcher decided against sub-themes for this category. Alternatively, the competencies were clustered together where possible. Table 5 gives an indication of the competencies as well as the most descriptive responses offered by participants.

Table 5

##### *The future competencies of counsellors*

| <b>Theme</b>                    | <b>Response</b>  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Client centeredness</b>      | <p><i>"I will be able to deal more effectively with clients' concerns/feeling rather than focusing on my issues."</i></p> <p><i>"Knowing exactly what they have experienced will give me an opportunity to be vigilant enough to conduct the sessions with an understanding."</i></p>                                |
| <b>Interpersonal awareness</b>  | <p><i>"I notice that working as a team can lead you to achieve many things. It is good and healthier to put trust in other people as they will help you in time of need."</i></p> <p><i>"Working well with other people who are in my team or colleagues in general."</i></p>  |
| <b>Maturity/professionalism</b> | <p><i>"It encouraged me not to give up in life and strive for what I want in future. Feeling sorry for myself won't take me anywhere."</i></p> <p><i>"It can change my life in a sense that now I can be able to cope with my own and that I cannot just react when the client is presenting his/her story."</i></p> |

Table 5 Continues

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Planning and organising</b>       | <i>“To have a proper plan and also plan ahead.”</i><br><i>“To be able to plan properly.”</i>  |
| <b>Patience/persevere</b>            | <i>“In future I will learn that nothing came easy in life. Nothing is impossible in life, you need to work hard and learn to accept everything the way it is.”</i><br><i>“I still need to practice more on the debriefing process, but I think I will be able to do it.”</i>  |
| <b>Self-awareness</b>                | <i>“Being aware of my emotions and feelings and how to handle and control them.”</i><br><i>“It made me realise that I should make time to reflect on my day and make time to become more aware of what is taking place around me. This will help me to be more aware of my thoughts/feelings and aid me not to rush through life unaware.”</i>  |
| <b>Self-confidence</b>               | <i>“The experience I acquired today has taught me to be confident and not to be anxious whenever I am faced with a challenge.”</i><br><i>“The activity brought back my confidence of which I will always need to do the debriefing.”</i>  |
| <b>Trauma counselling competence</b> | <i>“Able to engage in debriefing of members. Equipped to do my work more effectively in our field of work.”</i><br><i>“I will be able to identify between crisis, stress and trauma. This will help me to determine whether members need counselling or to be debriefed.”</i>   |
| <b>Unconditional positive regard</b> | <i>“I’ve learned to understand how frustration can be in others. Everybody is unique and need to be respected. I’ve also learned that empathy, acceptance and support will help each other to have positive thinking.”</i><br><i>“Acceptance and understanding other peoples believes and values are the key.”</i><br><i>“To let people speak their minds, although it sometimes does not make sense what they are saying.”</i> |

Table 5 describes how the trauma counselling training programme will change each participant’s competence of efficiency in the future. From the results, it appears that there were numerous competencies that were identified by the participants:

Client centeredness: Participants reported that their competency in future will be affected by: (a) the ability to put the client first in any trauma counselling session, (b) the ability to listen attentively to the client, and (c) the ability to put the client’s feelings at the centre of the counselling session.

Interpersonal awareness: According to the participants, being able to work with different people, cultures, and a multi-disciplinary team are important in order to achieve different goals. Participants also regarded it as the ability to work well with people and interacting with other people in a positive manner.

Maturity/professionalism: Participants reported that the competency of being mature and to show professionalism is important. This entails the ability to push through when things get tough, as well as to show professionalism during a debriefing session. In essence, it meant having the ability to separate one's own emotions from the client's experiences during a counselling session.

Planning and organising: Participants regarded planning and organising as an ability which is important for a counsellor. This is the ability to plan ahead, to plan personal assignments properly and to allocate resources appropriately.

Patience/perseverance: Participants reported that patience and to persevere at all times are important competencies. Participants indicated that they will never give up and keep on practising the debriefing process. In addition, the participants also viewed patience/perseverance as the ability to be steady and persistent in the course of action and having a purpose in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragements.

Self-awareness: Participants regarded self-awareness as an important competency for counsellor to have. As trauma counselling is all about dealing with a person's emotions, the participants indicated that it is important for them to be able to be conscious of their own character, feelings, motives, and desires.

Self-confidence: Some participants reported that self-confidence is important for counsellors. Participants regarded self-confidence as the ability to develop and maintain inner strength based on the desire to succeed and a person's belief that he or she possesses the capabilities to succeed. The trauma counselling training course provided the participants with the confidence to facilitate a debriefing session accordingly.

Trauma counselling competence: According to participants, this ability implies being competent as a trauma counsellor and to do their work more effectively in their field.

Unconditional positive regard: To have the ability to accept and respect others without judging or/and evaluating each other.

## Discussion

### Outline of the findings

The general objective of this study was to explore the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme. The results of the study are discussed next by referring to the specific objectives as set for this study.

The *first objective* of this study was to determine how trauma and trauma counselling is conceptualised in the literature. As a result of consulting trauma literature, a basic definition for trauma and traumatic stress can be summarised as; a psychological wound inflicted by a traumatic event which involved an individual experiencing, witnessing or being confronted with actual or threatened death, serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of others (see Figley, 2013; Everly et al., 2000). Trauma in South Africa occurs on a daily basis by means of events such as physical and/or sexual violence, accidents, unexpected death of a loved one, witnessing a death etc. (Atwoli, *et al.*, 2013). Trauma counselling is necessary in order to assist individuals to manage trauma reactions. For the purposes of this study, trauma counselling is summarised as helping the individual to manage trauma reactions and to come to terms with his/her emotions, feelings and thoughts during and after the traumatic experience (see Inter Trauma Nexus, 2011).

The *second objective* of this study was to determine the content and methodology of a trauma counselling training programme in the SAPS. Training in trauma counselling in the SAPS occurs mainly from an experiential learning approach. The trauma counselling training programme in the SAPS comprises a nine-day programme at a remote training venue. During the training, the participants are exposed to different experiences, where they differentiate between cognitive learning (written tests) and behavioural learning (role plays and simulation). The participants are encouraged to journal their experiences during the training.

The trauma intervention model used to train trauma counsellors in the SAPS are based on an adapted version of the Mitchell Critical Incident Stress Management model (CISM) (Maabela, 2011; Watson *et al.*, 2013). Critical incident stress management in the SAPS comprises a range of crisis intervention services that usually include training managers,

individual crisis counselling (termed debriefing), group counselling, and post-incident referral for primary and secondary victims (see Everly & Mitchell, 1997; Watson *et al.*, 2013). The trauma intervention model used in the SAPS to assist police officials after a traumatic incident consists of seven phases; the introduction and beginning phase followed by the fact phase, where the facts of the traumatic experience are explored, the thought phase, where the numerous thoughts that went through the counselee's mind are explained, the feeling phase, where the emotions are explored which the counselee experienced during the traumatic incident, the teaching phase in which different coping mechanisms are explored, the coping/recovery phase, where the counsellor prepares the counselee to return to work, and the end phase where the counselling session is closed (Maabela, 2011; Watson *et al.*, 2013).

The *third objective* of this study was to explore the experiences trauma counsellors captured in their journals during the training. The participants completed the journals on a daily basis and were guided by four questions which were used as categories for the findings. These are discussed next:

### **Thought-experiences**

Firstly, the participants were asked to journal their experiences relating to the thoughts they had during their training. Six themes emerged from this category. Firstly, the thought experiences participants referred to in their journals related to appreciation for the opportunity to take part in the trauma counselling training programme as well as appreciation of privileges. These findings correlate with a study showing that people will appreciate the training when they understand the value the training can add to their profession while they are being developed and trained within a certain space (Taylor, 2012).

The findings further showed that participants had various concerns which they thought about and reflected on in the journals. These concerns included uncertainty about the training programme which relates to findings from Doyle (2011), namely that it is common for individuals to be unsure, as a training programme's objectives are sometimes unknown to the participants. The uncertainty is further enhanced by the experiential learning which is based on the idea that learning is facilitated by a process of experiencing new ideas, which in itself is an uncertain process (Kolb & Kolb, 2012).

Other concerns from the participants included concerns regarding the facilitators, their fellow counsellors, their safety/survival, the training content and venue. One way of looking at these concerns is by referring to the principles of experiential learning. This is where activities are provided in such a way that participants are challenged, and might even experience a degree of anxiety. As the participants successfully complete each activity, growth is enabled (McKenzie, 2000). Another possible explanation for the concerns is by referring to the principles of wilderness therapy (especially the concerns regarding their safety, physical capacity, the training environment and wild animals) (Crisp, 1998). The isolated nature of the venue adds to the therapeutic wilderness milieu, especially so with the minimal equipment available. According to Crisp (1998), the success of such therapy relates to several characteristics of the participants, of which one is the participants' sense of environmental awareness. Nadler (as cited in McKenzie, 2000) argues that it is particularly the unfamiliar environment that is important during wilderness training, since it creates a state of dissonance by creating a constructive level of anxiety. By overcoming this dissonance through the mastery of tasks, the participants experience positive benefits.

The findings further showed that participants understood the importance of group membership which was a prerequisite for the successful completion of group activities. According to Cartwright and Zander (1968), members who are in cohesive groups, will be motivated to advance the group's objectives and to participate in activities together as a group. McKenzie (2000) further states that various aspects guide the success of group work. These include for instance a feeling of mutual dependence among group members, and personal relationships developing between group members.

Another theme that was found in the results related to the participants' sense of self. The participants thought about how they would be perceived by the group when self-revelation took place. Participants also indicated that they thought about past experiences, such as the death of a loved one. According to Haynes (2007), experiential learning involves participants being collaborative and reflective towards each experience, in order to help them to "fully learn new skills and knowledge" (p. 24). Furthermore, McLaughlin and Song (2013) indicate that looking back on one's past enables one to identify mistakes that one made and improve one's future by learning from past mistakes. In such a way, personal growth takes place.

During the training the participants were exposed to several scenario exercises in order to provide practical experience for the associated theory. The participants reported in their journal entries that, although the exercises were experienced as traumatic, it gave them insight into the experiences of police officials. According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), experiential learning proposes a constructivist theory of learning whereby social knowledge is created and recreated in the personal knowledge of the learner. According to literature, participants may not understand the purpose of experiential learning because they do not understand why they are being exposed to true life scenarios which may sometimes trigger unresolved trauma that they have experienced themselves (Yardley, Teunisen & Dornan, 2012), which was viewed in this study.

### **Emotion experiences**

It became clear from the analyses that the participants experienced various emotions. The findings show that negative emotions such as, anxiety, nervousness, uncertainty, and fear were experienced, especially prior to and during the activities (test, role play, scenario and blindfolding exercises). It seems that the idea of being evaluated on their knowledge and skills caused participants to experience these emotions. It can also be assumed that the participants did not know what to expect before the training, thus causing them to experience these negative emotions. However, the participants also reported various positive emotions that were experienced regarding the overall training programme which included instance calm, excited, happy, joy, and relaxed. These findings are in accordance with the assumptions of social constructivism showing that the participants developed subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). This finding is best explained by the research of Petranek, Corey and Black (1992) which indicated that participants could expect to experience various types of emotions during simulations. During these times, participants unconsciously process the different types of learning material, and they feel excited and energised by simulations, however, they can also experience self-consciousness. Petranek, *et al.* (1992) state that the emotional high in a simulation creates a flood of energy that needs to be channelled, for which the journaling process is ideal. Journaling assists the participants to make sense of the information and debrief emotions related to the simulations.

## **Impact of experiences**

The third category which emerged from the findings was the impact of the counsellor's daily experiences. The participants reported that the environment had a calming impact on them, and that they were also more alert, as they thought there might be wild animals. According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), one of the prepositions of experiential learning is that it results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment. This was confirmed in the findings that the external environment impacted on each participant differently since some participants commented on the pleasant experience they had from the environment.

According to the findings, the participants reported that they realised the importance of group membership, and this made an impact on them. The participants indicated various aspects that they deemed important for the success of a group; namely, group cohesion, listening to fellow group members, reaching mutual goals, and sharing experiences. Support and trust was reported on and how it helped to reach a mutual goal. Yukelson (2006) indicated that a team, who has open and honest communication, where group members listen to each other could expect enhanced group cohesion and team building. When a group has shared a vision and developed as a unit, it creates synergistic empowerment which helps the group to reach their mutual goal. As noted by Haynes, (2007), one of the steps that comprise experiential learning is sharing/reflecting "What Happened?" During this step, participants share the results of exercises, reactions and observations with fellow participants.

The participants further indicated that the opportunity to reflect on their emotions, their past experiences and sharing these experiences made an impact on them. This can be explained by the study of Boud, Keogh and Walker (2013) where the way individuals respond to new experiences are determined significantly by past experiences which contribute to the way in which the individual sees the world. They also stated that the when individuals get the chance to look back at their past experiences, if gives them the chance to reflect on the route their life took.

The findings reported that participants came to various self-insights during the training programme, which made an impact on them. Kolb and Kolb (2005) described learning as the process of interchanging between opposing modes of reflection and action and feeling and

thinking in order for learning to take place. The participants should thus be aware of themselves during experiential learning and understand their own behaviours, actions, feelings and thoughts to optimally gain from experiential learning.

Another sub-theme that emerged from this finding was that the participants realised their own capabilities, namely their positive ability to cope, their physical abilities, as well as their trauma counselling capabilities. The participants were further impacted by the insight and understanding of how police officials experience trauma. From these findings a sense of empowerment is noted which relates to the principles of optimal functioning. According to Rothmann & Sieberhagen (1997), optimal functioning refers to a positive and dynamic development process during which an individual acquires a clearer self-concept through self-disclosure and feedback from the environment. This is where self-evaluation positively takes place, while self-objectivity is still possible, and having more effective interaction with others.

### **Competencies of efficiency**

The fourth and last category that emerged from the findings was the different competencies of efficiency which counsellors identified as important. The competencies were listed by the participants as follows:

- Client centeredness
- Interpersonal awareness
- Maturity/professionalism
- Planning and organising
- Patience/persevere
- Self-awareness
- Self-confidence
- Trauma counselling competence
- Unconditional positive regard

Seeing that the SAPS trauma counsellors are qualified social workers, psychologists and chaplains, the list of competencies clearly relates to the core business of employees in the helping-professions. According to Pack (2004, 2009), different competencies are required for

trauma counsellors. Trauma counsellors need to reflect on their current skills, develop relationships with their clients and make sense of their work, themselves and their environment (Pack, 2004; 2009). The findings of this category are in accordance with Pack, since the participants reported they reflected on their situation and identified above mentioned competencies for efficiency in order for them to be successful counsellors in the future.

From the results it seems clear that the training programme used for trauma counsellors in the SAPS is successful in its endeavour to equip counsellors. From the journal entries it was clear that the counsellors seem more aware of their role and responsibility as trauma counsellors. Although the training does provide challenges, such as the physical element, the challenging environment and nature of the training exercises, the counsellors reported that they came to self-insights, and growth took place. The participants realised their own capabilities, as well as gained insight and understanding of how police officials experience trauma. The findings show that the participants felt empowered and more confident to assist police officials with their trauma recovery after the training.

### Practical implications

The practical implication of this study relates to Industrial Psychology being the science of addressing work-related wellbeing in organisations. Police officials are often confronted with critical incidents with the risk of being traumatised. Not only is the trauma in itself a risk to the officials, the inherent job stressors police officials have to deal with increases stress and negatively influences their wellbeing (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2005). According to the Health Professions Act (2011), Industrial and Organisational (I-O) psychology deals with work-related issues of well-adjusted adults for the purpose to optimising wellbeing and effectiveness by applying principles of psychology. The main goal of I-O psychologists is therefore to “plan, develop and apply paradigms, theories, models, constructs and principles of psychology to issues related to the world of work in order to understand, modify and enhance individual, group and organisational behaviour well-being and effectiveness” (South Africa Department of Health, 2012). Industrial psychologists should be able to support employees in distress by means of counselling, thereby addressing the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole, as well as the individuals’ wellbeing (Rothmann & Cilliers, 2007;

Schreuder, 2001). Assisting employees who experience distresses in the workplace can be a daunting task if the counsellor lacks sufficient counselling skills. Training in an effective trauma counselling programme is therefore necessary to equip industrial psychologists to support employees in the workplace. The study is thus further valuable to the psychologists, social workers and chaplains who are being trained as trauma counsellors with the correct skills and competencies in order to assist the police officials with their trauma. Ultimately this will contribute to the police officials' wellbeing and may lessen occurrences such as absenteeism, depression and post-traumatic stress levels amongst police officials.

### Limitations and recommendations

No study is without limitations, these are reported next, and recommendations for future research and practice are made.

Since this study entails a case study, the purpose was thus not to necessarily understand the SAPS training programme, but to describe and explore the experience. The research strategy followed could thus limit the generalisability of the findings. The unequal distribution among different gender, ethnic, and language amongst the participants can also be viewed as a limitation.

It is recommended that future research should consider a longitudinal design because of the dynamic and flexible nature of a trauma counselling training programme. A longitudinal study from a mixed method approach could determine the effects that the training holds over time. It is also recommended that a similar study be undertaken in the other security sectors in South Africa. Lastly, a similarly study including triangulation could be conducted in order to determine more valid and reliable findings, and structuring a stronger research design. Methods such as interviewing, questionnaires and observations can be incorporated with the journal entries to enhance data gathering.

### Recommendations for the practice

It is recommended that other organisations in South Africa consider a similar approach to trauma management. By training specialist employees such as industrial psychologists, work-related psychopathology or psychological trauma could be addressed.

## Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the experiences of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme. The results of the study showed that trauma counselling training was effective in the following ways: the participants showed increased self-awareness, self-insight and reported that they overcame their own fears. This is indicative of stimulation of the self-actualising tendency. Apart from various emotional experiences, the participants concluded that they felt empowered and gained more insight into the trauma experiences of police officials. The new knowledge pertaining to counselling skills and their own abilities impacted the participants and they valued the ability to have empathy and learning about various trauma counselling approaches. After the training, the participants felt confident to approach officials who experienced trauma and knew how to conduct a trauma debriefing session. It seems that the trauma counselling training programme in the SAPS can be summarised as being both exhausting and rewarding.

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## CHAPTER 3

## **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chapter 3 consists of conclusions from the study. These conclusions are drawn from the literature review and the findings in accordance to the study's research objectives. The limitations of the research are discussed, followed by recommendations for future research.

### **3.1 Conclusion**

The objective of the study was to explore the experience of counsellors during a trauma counselling training programme. It can be concluded that the training programme was effective in its endeavour. The training programme resulted in the participants being more self-aware and showing increased self-insight. The participants reported that they gained more insight and understanding of how police officials experience trauma. The training programme contributed to the participants feeling empowered and more confident to assist police officials with their trauma recovery. Four categories emerged from the findings which resulted in various themes and subthemes that were extracted within each category. Figure 1 provides a summary of the categories and themes.

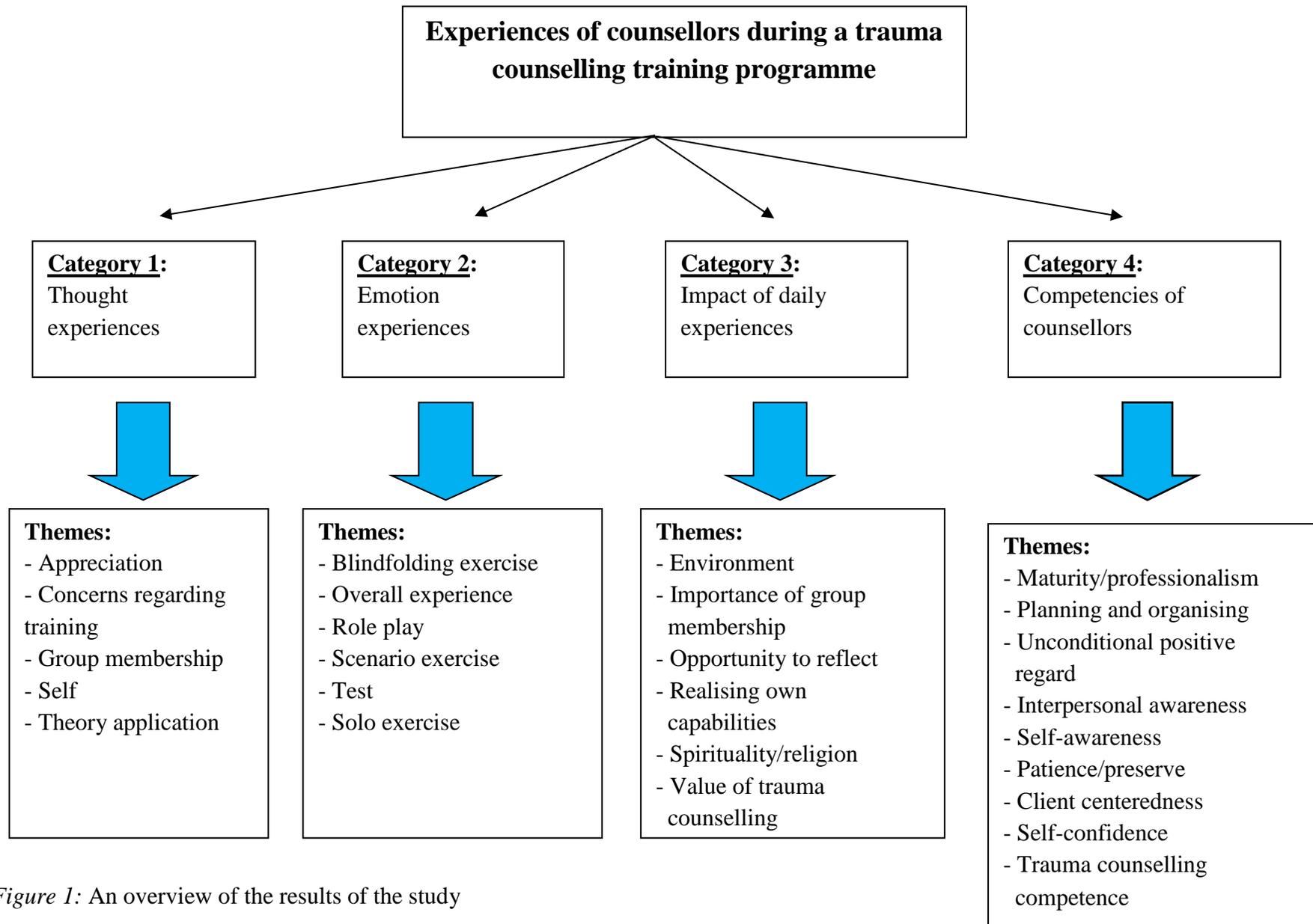


Figure 1: An overview of the results of the study

From the overview the following conclusions are drawn based on the objectives of the study.

***Specific objective 1: To determine how trauma and trauma counselling is conceptualised in the literature.***

## **Trauma**

Janoff-Bulman (1992) conceptualised trauma as an event that is discrepant with a person's meaning system and alters or damages that person's meaning system (and sometimes those of their family and friends). In other words, trauma can be seen as a wound of the mind (Caruth, 2010), or an emotional wound or shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development of a person, often leading to neurosis (South African Association of Certified Trauma Therapists, 2014). Trauma can be caused by a series of dangerous events which occur unexpectedly with an overwhelming effect to the individual or the individual's significant others (Figley, 2013). In order to help victims to recover from a traumatic event or who have experienced trauma, trauma counselling is necessary.

## **Trauma counselling**

Literature indicates that trauma counselling is viewed as one aspect of trauma intervention. The intervention process ranges from initial support immediately after the traumatic incident, to a more long-term process of counselling and therapy (Tehrani, 2004). Psychological debriefing has become a popular trauma intervention over the years. The aim of debriefing is to review the facts, thoughts and feelings of the victim after the traumatic incident. Although the generic term "psychological debriefing" is used to describe trauma interventions in the literature, trauma counselling is used as a term in this study to refer to the intervention process provided to police officials. Mitchell (1997) defines trauma intervention as the procedure where the focus is kept on returning the victim to an adaptive level of independent functioning. The goal would be to get the victim's independent functioning estimated or exceeded in accordance to the pre-crisis level of adaptation (Everly & Mitchell, 1997; Wollman, 1993).

***Specific objective 2: To determine the content and methodology of a trauma counselling training programme in the SAPS.***

The specific trauma training applied within the South African Police Service is based on a psychological debriefing model and psychological skills training using an experiential learning approach. According to O' Donohue, *et al.* (2003), there are a number of advantages in psychological skills training of which the most important is that it is remedial and preventative. It provides clear, testable hypotheses on the origin of psychological problems and is consistent with a personal growth model and intervention model. Psychological skills training frameworks, intervention development and experiential learning is in line with the social learning theory of Bandura which focus on self-efficacy and behaviour motivation (French & Bell, 1999; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; O' Donohue *et al.*, 2003). It is further clear that the facilitation process used during the training programme seemed to be effective. Opportunities to acquire learning and learning about the self, own behaviour and behavioural change were provided. This assisted development of self, and enhanced interpersonal relationships and teamwork in such a matter that participants took responsibility for their own actions in order to face challenges in a constructive manner and to help them achieve their goals (see Cilliers, 1996, 2000; Corey, 1990; Gordon, 1994; Rothmann & Van Aardt, 2002).

The current trauma counselling training in the South African Police Service consists of a nine day programme, which includes exercises such as role play, solo exercises, individual assignments/tests, simulations and practical examinations. In addition, learners work on group assignments specifically to train them to manage a traumatic incident. During the training the experiences of the counsellors are recorded daily by means of journaling.

***Specific objective 3: To determine the experiences trauma counsellors capture in their journals during the trauma counselling training.***

According to the findings, four categories emerged from the results:

1. Thought experiences of the counsellors
2. Emotion experiences of the counsellors
3. Impact of daily experiences
4. Future competencies of the counsellors.

### **Thought experiences of the counsellors**

The conclusion that can be made regarding the thought experiences of the participants is that apart from the fact that the training was challenging, they did indeed show appreciation for the experience. Concerns were mentioned, such as having uncertainties concerning the trauma counselling training programme, concerns related to the facilitators, fellow counsellors, concern regarding safety/survival, content of the training, the training environment. This category's results showed however that the participants' reflections led to increased self-awareness as well as awareness of others (group membership). The participants were aware of their role in the group in order to ensure that goals are met. Bennetts (2003) reports that participants during counselling training indicate greater awareness of group dynamics and learning through group members. Another finding by Bennetts (2003) relates to the participants showing increase insights and relating to self and others. This was also true for the current study, where the participants indicated that they were more aware of themselves in terms of how others' viewed them, as well as reflected on their strengths and weaknesses according to the feedback they received. The findings from the study of Bennetts (2003) also relates to the last theme of this category where the participants portrayed more insight into the experiences of the police officials, thereby indicating greater insight and understanding for their experiences. Bennetts' study showed that the participants made a jump from "cold to caring" (p. 317), to express emotion and to link it to the self and others.

### **Emotion experiences of counsellors**

The next category showed that the participants made several entries in their journals relating to their emotion experiences. It can be concluded that the emotions were in most cases coupled to the training simulations, while other emotion entries related to the training overall. Upon consulting emotion theory to gain insight into the participant's emotion experiences, the wheel of emotions developed by Plutchnik (2001) was noted. Plutchnik developed the wheel of emotions indicating the various relationships between emotions. In the wheel the intensity of emotions increases close to the wheel's centre, and similarly decreases when moving outward (Plutchnik, 2001).

The wheel of emotions was used to evaluate the emotions the participants' reported during the simulations. The intensity of emotion experienced and the type of simulations are indicated in Table 1 (see Plutchnik, 2001) (see following page).

Table 1

*Intensity of emotion experiences*

| Intensity     | Simulations: Negative emotions |  |  |           |                   | Simulations: Positive emotions |   |  |                           |            |                   |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--|--|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------|------------|-------------------|
|               | Blindfold                      | Overall  |  | Role play | Scenario          | Test                           | Overall   |  | Role play                 | Solo       | Test              |
| <b>High</b>   | Fear                           | Fear<br>Afraid<br>Panic  | Sad<br>Scared  | -         | Scared<br>Shocked | -                              | Empowered *(power)<br>Joy   |  | -                         | -          | -                 |
| <b>Medium</b> | -                              | Angry<br>Alone (lonely)*<br>Anxious<br>Downhearted   | Tired<br>Helpless<br>Hopeless                          | Anxious   | -                 | Anxious<br>Nervous             | Belonging (trust)*<br>Empathy (nurturing)*<br>Exited<br>Proud                                   |  | -                         | -          | -                 |
| <b>Low</b>    | -                              | Nervous<br>Worried (pensive)*<br>Irritated<br>Overwhelmed<br>Confused<br>Disappointed<br>Uncertain<br>Stressed | Uncomfortable<br>Vulnerable<br>Pressured (Frustrated)* | Nervous   | -                 | -                              | Acceptance<br>Comfortable<br>Confidence<br>Curious<br>Determined<br>Good<br>Positive<br>Relaxed | Relieved<br>Calm<br>Happy<br>Interested<br>Motivated | Calm<br>Happy<br>Relieved | Confidence | Happy<br>Relieved |

\* Emotion not found on emotion wheel, closest related emotion indicated in brackets

From the table is clear that the highest intensity on negative emotions was experienced by the blindfolding (fear) and scenario (scared, shocked) exercises. The overall experience of the training provided five intensely high negative emotions (fear, afraid, panic, sad and scared). Secondly, on medium intensity the role-play and test exercises both resulted in the participants reporting that they felt anxious and nervous, similarly with the overall training experience. On the low intensity level the overall experience was indicated with emotion words such as worried, confused and pressured. The blindfolding and scenario exercises were the only simulations that produced only negative (high intensity) emotions from all the training exercises.

On the positive intensity the overall training experience, overpowered and joy were indicated with high intensity, while emotion words such as belonging, empathy and proud as medium intensity. The solo training exercise is the only exercise that produced only positive emotions (low intensity).

### **Impact of daily experiences on counsellors**

It can be concluded from the results that group membership had a major impact on the participants, since the participants reflected on their role in the group in both the previous and current categories. According to Öster, Hedestig, Johansson, Klingstedt & Lindh (2013), individuals who share their personal experiences with others helped in supporting them and being able to relate to other people who went through similar experiences. The sharing equates to reflecting on what they discovered and relating it to past experiences which can be used for future use. Boud, Keogh and Walker (2013) indicated that when individuals trust and support each other, learning can take place, as individuals have the confidence in sharing experiences, which enhances learning.

It seems clear from the results that the participants' showed increased self-actualising tendencies towards the end of the training programme, since the current category indicated results such as "realising their own capabilities" and "coming to self-insights". The self-actualising tendency can be defined as the process where individuals or groups take ownership for direction, and learning takes place, where individuals learn from one another through their individual contributions (see Cilliers, 2000).

In this category the participants indicated that the value of trauma counselling became clear, and what especially impacted them was the increased insight into the traumatic experiences, their clients (the police officials) are exposed to. From this result it can be concluded that the trauma counsellors understood their role as counsellors of police officials experiencing traumatic stress.

### **Competencies of counsellors**

Although the participants listed competencies they viewed as important for their future functioning as trauma counsellors, it can be concluded from literature that these are indeed viewed as the most important skills and competencies a trauma counsellor should have (Tehrani, 2004). The list of competencies the participants identified (indicated in italics below) can be incorporated into the skill set as found in Tehrani (2004: p. 98):

- Observation skills: gathering information about the situation, assessing and observing others, including being *self-aware*.
- Responding skills: use skills to paraphrase and summarise, appropriate disclosure of actual information and feelings (*client centeredness and unconditional positive regard*)
- Networking skills: ability to work with others in a team and able to deal with differences and communicate concern openly (implies *maturity/professionalism and self-confidence*)
- Communication skills: skills in greeting, making requests and talking to strangers showing sympathy and being assertive (*interpersonal awareness*)
- Training and education: provide skills, feedback, advice and coaching to others. Offer additional information to clients and colleagues. (Implies *trauma counselling competence and planning and organising*).
- Listening skills: reflecting thoughts, matching the mood to the situation and demonstrating attention (*patience/persevere*).

The fourth objective will be discussed in the recommendations section 3.3.

## 3.2 Limitations

Regardless of the positive results of the study; there were various limitations. One limitation was the unequal distribution among different gender, ethnic, age and language groups. The study only focused on one group of counsellors who were trained as trauma counsellors, and thus, the results cannot be generalised throughout the SAPS. Since no previous studies on training trauma counsellors in South Africa are available, it was difficult to draw conclusions from the findings.

Another limitation relates to only the one method of data gathering used in the study. By triangulating the study, by including for e.g. interviews or focus groups', the data integrity could have been increased.

## 3.3 Recommendations

The *fourth objective* of this study was to make recommendations for training trauma counsellors in the SAPS.

### 3.3.1. Recommendations for training trauma counsellors in the SAPS

Since the researcher focussed on the experiences the participants captured in their journals, it is not clear which process the facilitators of the programme followed to debrief the participants after each simulation. Although a facilitation process was followed after each simulation (Watson, personal communication, June 13, 2014), a recommendation to the facilitators could be to consult the work of Petranek, Corey and Black (1992). This states that the learning process during simulations is enhanced with the debriefing of the four *E*'s: events, emotions, empathy and explanations, thereby ensuring that the emotion experiences of the participants are effectively attended to.

From the study it is recommended that other trauma counselling techniques should be considered during training of specifically the SAPS clinical psychologists who are in a position to provide therapeutic interventions, e.g. cognitive-behavioural approaches and psychodynamic principles.

### **3.3.2. Recommendations for future research**

Finally, recommendations for future research include studying the training programme over a longer period in order to establish the long term value and development. A longitudinal study should enhance the learning and make available more practical opportunities to establish the new learned skills into learned behaviour that is transparent from situation to situation. A further study could also facilitate focus groups with the participants as a means of triangulating the results from the groups' impressions.

The next recommendation will be to enlarge the population size to include a wider representation of counsellors. A sample size that included counsellors from other security industries as well may add to the value of the study and application to the workplace.

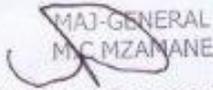
It is recommended that a future study include recommendations from the participants on how the training programme could be improved. Lastly, a similar study where interviews are included as data collection method could assist in establishing more credibility to the research process.

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## APPENDIX A

|   |   |
|---|---|
|    | <b>SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE</b>   |
| <b>SUID-AFRIKAANSE POLISIEDIENS</b>   |   |
| Privaatsak/Private Bag X94<br>Posbus/Post Office Box  |   |
| <p>Verwysing<br/>Reference <b>3/1/5/202/1</b></p> <p>Navrae<br/>Enquiries <b>Lt Col MS Watson</b></p> <p>Telefoon<br/>Telephone <b>(012) 393 5469/ 5167</b></p> <p>Faksnomm<br/>er<br/>Fax<br/>number <b>(012) 393 1702</b></p>   | <b>THE HEAD EMPLOYEE, HEALTH AND<br/>WELLNESS<br/>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT<br/>PRETORIA<br/>0001</b> |
| <br><b>THE HEAD OF DEPARMENT<br/>INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY<br/>NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY</b>  |   |
| <br><b>RESEARCH: THE EMOTION EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA COUNSELLORS DURING<br/>TRAINING WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE</b>   |   |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The above mentioned research was approved verbally in March 2014 after the perusal of the research proposal document.</li><li>2. The South African Police Service, Employee Health and Wellness has no objection towards the research on the following conditions:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The results of the research be made known to the South African Police Service and a copy of the research finalized document be provided to Employee Health and Wellness.</li><li>b. That the results of the research only be published within scientific accredited journals and not be made known to popular media in written or verbal form,</li><li>c. That the individuals that participated within the research remain anonymous and not discussed with any participating individual.</li></ol></li><li>3. This research will enable the South African Police Service to obtain a qualitative idea on the impact of the trauma counseling course as well as means to improve the course in future.</li></ol> |   |
| <br>MAJ-GENERAL<br>MC MZAMANE  | <b>MAJOR GENERAL<br/>HEAD: EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLNESS<br/>MC MZAMANE</b>                            |