WHAT HELPS AND HINDERS COPING WITH INTEGRATED CHILD EXPLOITATION WORK: A CRITICAL INCIDENT STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

The internet is now intrinsically woven into our culture. Although beneficial in many ways, the internet also offers safety and anonymity to collectors and preferential child molesters, allowing them to accumulate and trade graphic images of child sexual abuse, groom vulnerable and unsuspecting children, and locate children to sexually exploit. It is impossible to estimate the scope of this growing problem. As technology develops, investigators continue to see an increase in the use of the internet for these nefarious purposes.

In an effort to identify the victims and locate the perpetrators of these heinous crimes, police are working together in integrated units specializing in child exploitation. Work on an Integrated Child Exploitation (ICE) team requires individuals to perform a number of investigative tasks, including viewing graphic images and videos of children being sexually assaulted and tortured, in an effort to identify the victims and locate the perpetrators. Being involved in these investigations and exposed to graphic material on an on going basis can place investigators at higher risk for developing secondary traumatic stress. To date, no studies have explored the impact of the work of ICE team members. In this study, 14 individuals working with the “E” Division ICE team were interviewed using the Critical Incident Technique, to determine what helps and hinders coping with the work. A total of 795 incidents were sorted into 446 helping and 349 hindering categories. The categories were further divided into 40 helping and 35 hindering subcategories. Helpful categories included employing specific strategies when viewing graphic images, psychological support, personal strategies, peer support, meaningfulness/purpose, social support, personal characteristics, cognitive strategies, organizational support, supervision, humour and candidate selection. Included in the hindering categories were the impacts of ICE work, the criminal justice system, viewing torture and assault, lack of resources, barriers to psychological interventions, organizational factors, workload, technology, challenges posed by the newness of the unit, government policies/international challenges, working on lengthy files, and lack of societal understanding. Significance and implications for the RCMP, contributions to the field, implications for counselling psychology, and limitations of the research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

> There is no den in the world to hide a rogue. Commit a crime and the earth is made of glass. Commit a crime, and it seems as if a coat of snow fell on the ground such as reveals in the woods the track of every partridge, and fox, and squirrel.
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882)

The World Wide Web

Access to the World Wide Web has become a reality for millions of people in our society over the past decade. Recognition of the value of advancing technologies has rapidly made the internet an indispensable tool for use in business, education and personal/family communication. There is at least one regular internet user in 64% of Canadian households, accessing the internet from home, school, public library or other location (Statistics Canada, 2003). The internet is fuelled by the wealth of easily available information, offering global searches on every topic imaginable, providing instant communication, opportunities to plan and book vacations, purchase automobiles, and other goods and services at the stroke of a key. Access to the internet has forever changed our world, creating a truly global society.

Along with the benefits, internet access has a very dark side. The privacy and anonymity afforded by internet use has created a vast repository for collectors and preferential child molesters looking to prey upon the most vulnerable members of society. The availability and affordability of digital cameras, videos and web cams has opened the doors to the production, and on line trading, of graphic child abuse images. Technological advances have facilitated the increased availability of child pornography in

Canada and internationally, and contributed to the development of advertising for child sex tourism destinations (Criminal Intelligence Service Canada [CISC], 2005). As a result, criminal networks have emerged on-line to share child pornography, learn how to produce child pornography, and exchange tips on how to avoid detection (CISC, 2005).

Integrated Child Exploitation Units

In the mid 1990s police agencies across the globe began to recognize the internet was being utilized as a tool to facilitate child exploitation. In response, the first investigative units dedicated to identifying and locating victims and suspects of internet child exploitation were created. Since that time, Integrated Child Exploitation (ICE) units have emerged internationally, as police agencies respond to the increasing volume of tips and requests for assistance. According to the Virtual Globe Task Force, a partnership comprising the Australian High Tech Crime Centre, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Interpol, there are an estimated 50,000 sexual predators on-line at any given moment (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, 2006). And while it is impossible to accurately estimate the numbers of child sexual abuse images on the World Wide Web, there is a general consensus that the internet has significantly increased the accessibility and availability of this material (Wells, Finkelhor, Wolak, & Mitchell, 2004).

According to Sergeant Janis Gray, Non Commissioned Officer in charge of the “E” Division ICE team, the role and responsibility of an Integrated Child Exploitation team member is quite diverse, ranging from interviewing, report writing, conducting technical computer searches, offering guidance to other agencies, making arrests, supporting families, comforting victims, and providing information to the judiciary, law enforcement, and the general public. ICE work carries its own unique set of challenges. These stem from (a) the relative recency of the laws, (b) uneducated judiciary, (c) the multi-jurisdictional nature of investigations, (d) ever-changing technologies, (e) differences in laws throughout the world, (f) the anonymity the internet offers to offenders, (g) the lack of policing resources, (h) the enormous volume of requests for assistance and (i) the sheer number of investigations (J. Gray, personal communication, May 4, 2006).

In addition to these challenges, and as part of ongoing criminal investigations, members of ICE units are required to view graphic images depicting the sexual abuse of children, in an effort to identify victims and suspects, and obtain evidence for eventual prosecution. The content they are exposed to can range from photographs of young children, to explicit video (with sound) of infants being tortured and raped. The amount of time spent viewing varies; however, it is a substantial aspect of the investigation, and one that can have a significant impact on investigators.

Although there is no literature specifically exploring the impact of ICE work on investigators, information from other sources on child exploitation mention the significant impact the work has upon those who are required to view these horrific images (W-Five, 2006; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2005). Detective Constable Warren Bulmer from the Child Exploitation Section of the Toronto Police recounted his experience of watching the rape of a 16 month old baby in an interview with CTV:

> During the entire two or three minutes of video, he screamed from start to finish. And I will never, ever forget that sound. Because visually, you can look away, or you can picture something else that's going on, but you can't get rid of the sound. While that movie's playing it doesn't matter where

you look in the room, you'll hear it (W-Five, 2006).

Major Theoretical Models

Research with professionals in the helping field has revealed that exposure to other peoples' difficult and traumatic experiences can lead to reactions similar in nature to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Figley, 1995a; Herman, 1992; Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996; Stamm, 1997). These symptoms are referred to as "compassion fatigue" (Figley, 1995a), "vicarious trauma" (Pearlman & MacIan, 1995) or "secondary traumatic stress" (Stamm, 1997). They constitute the natural consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about traumatizing events experienced by significant others, and or stress resulting from helping, or wanting to help, traumatized or suffering persons (Figley, 1995b). Keats (2005) conducted a study on the impact of vicarious witnessing during visits to concentration camps in Germany and Poland, and found her participants also demonstrated symptoms of vicarious trauma. Figley's (1995b) theoretical concept of secondary traumatic stress has informed my research and served as a guide for discussion.

Studies of police officers investigating serious and violent offences have revealed that exposure to these types of investigations (particularly homicides involving children, sexual assaults, cases of child abuse and neglect and child sexual abuse) place investigators at greater risk of developing secondary traumatic stress (Brown, Fielding, & Grover, 1999; Clarkson, 2006; Follette, Polusny, & Milbeck, 1994; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Lea, Auburn & Kibblewhite, 1999; Martin, McKean & Velktramp, 1986; Sewell, 1994). In order to function effectively during these investigations, many police officers disengage from their emotions in order to remain objective and professional (Evans, Coman, Stanley & Burrows, 1993; Pogrebin & Poole, 1991; Sewell, 1994; Violanti, 1999). Over time, this constant exposure to human suffering may lead to a breakdown in normal coping mechanisms, placing officers at higher risk of developing secondary traumatic stress (Haish & Meyers, 2004; Violanti & Gehrke, 2004). Researchers have identified specific protective factors that can help prevent these officers from developing secondary traumatic stress. Having a sense of meaning about their work, the presence of compassion satisfaction, and positive coping strategies all serve to strengthen protective barriers and mitigate secondary traumatic stress (Hart, Wearing & Heady, 1995; Hope, 2006; Stamm, 2005).

Purpose and Significance of this Research

From the related literature, it is likely that the type of work performed by ICE members places them at risk for developing secondary traumatic stress. As the number of child exploitation cases continues to increase, so too will the requirement for more trained individuals to investigate these difficult cases. The absence of research on the best ways to assist ICE members cope with their work is highly problematic, given the critical need to identify and develop ways to provide the best possible support in an effort to mitigate their risk of developing secondary traumatic stress.

The purpose of this critical incident study was to identify what helps and what hinders coping among members working on an Integrated Child Exploitation team. *Healthy coping* was defined as maintaining physical, mental and emotional health. Consistent with the assumptions of the research paradigm used in this study, participants were permitted to determine for themselves how healthily they were coping.

The primary contribution of this research to counselling practices is that it has identified and expanded existing knowledge of the pressures that exist on ICE units, and ways that members of that unit cope with their work. The information obtained on what helps and hinders coping can easily be translated for therapeutic use with clients who work in such environments. For example, counsellors and psychologists will now have greater awareness of some of the more difficult aspects of ICE work and the range of reactions that may be experienced by their clients. This greater awareness and sensitivity should assist the therapist in being more effective with ICE team members. The results in this study present a number of strategies participants found helped them to cope with ICE work. Working with clients to identify the presence or absence of these helpful coping strategies may be extremely therapeutic.

The information may also be extremely relevant from an organizational perspective, as the findings could assist the RCMP and other police departments around the world to develop protocols to ensure the health and wellbeing of those who work on units specializing in child sexual exploitation. Participants in this study commented on a variety of factors that impacted their coping including viewing graphic images and video of the sexual abuse of children, personal strategies, peer support, perceived organizational support, training, psychological interventions, family support, caseload management, the criminal justice system, technology, and lack of understanding of child exploitation outside of the team. These findings also have implications for the selection of individuals to work on ICE units.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Because internet child exploitation is so new, there have not been any published studies specifically addressing the impact of working on an ICE unit. Fortunately, there are a number of related constructs that inform this area, and add to our understanding of how the work may affect individuals. It is this literature that I will explore, beginning with the area of a) secondary traumatic stress, followed by b) studies on policing, c) the impact of investigating serious and violent offences, d) an overview of work on ICE units, e) coping, and finally, f) specific studies addressing coping and police work.

Background Theory

There has been a great deal of attention in the literature on identifying and understanding reactions experienced by trauma survivors. Posttraumatic stress reactions began to attract researchers' attention following the emergence of accounts of the symptoms experienced by those in the trenches of the first and second world wars. After the Vietnam War, descriptors such as *shell shock* and *combat fatigue* gave way to what is now commonly known as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD] (Sexton, 1999). Identifying three clusters of symptoms and reactions related to this disorder, researchers began to recognize that many survivors of child abuse, sexual assault, torture, and other traumatic events experienced similar reactions (Figley, 1995a). These posttraumatic stress reactions often included flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and memories, hyperactivity, avoidance of people, places, things, and other triggers; exaggerated startle reflex; and other symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The modern era for this field was established with the American Psychiatric Association's (1980) third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) that included PTSD for the first time. This new designation subsumed under one disorder a wide variety of syndromes that included: *rape trauma syndrome*, *concentration camp syndrome*, *combat fatigue*, *disaster syndrome, post Vietnam War syndrome*, and others (Figley, 1995b). The ensuing body of knowledge provided researchers, therapists, survivors and their families with valuable information to help them with coping and treatment (Figley, 1988).

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Considerable recognition and awareness of the impact upon those who work with these survivors began to emerge as early as the 1970s. At that time interviews conducted with Vietnam War veterans identified individuals who were experiencing significant guilt and regret about not being able to help others on the field of battle (Figley, 2002). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, this realization continued to attract empirical attention, resulting in a body of knowledge on both the positive and negative consequences of empathically caring for others, and working with traumatized individuals (Beaton & Murphy, 1995; Catherall, 1995; Figley, 1988; Figley, 1995a; Figley, 1995b; Follette et al., 1994; Herman, 1992; Kassam-Adams, 1995; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman, 1995; Stamm, 1995).

In 1995, three major books were published on the topic. Pearlman and Saakvitne's (1995) *Trauma and the Therapist* explored countertransference and vicarious traumatization as experienced by psychotherapists working with incest survivors. The other two books, *Compassion Fatigue* (Figley, 1995b) and *Secondary Traumatic Stress* (Stamm, 1995) contain numerous chapters that explored various outcomes related to the impact of working with traumatized individuals. The release of these books contributed significantly to the growing body of knowledge in the area of secondary traumatic stress, and increased awareness within the professional community. The books also called into question the various terminologies being used, such as “vicarious trauma”, “countertransference”, “compassion fatigue”, “secondary traumatic stress” and “burnout.” Much debate ensued, and continues to date, about the similarities and differences between these constructs. In order to provide clarification for readers, the following definitions for the terms have been provided:

Burnout. Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion building over time is the central feature of this construct (Maslach, 2001).

Countertransference. Linked to psychoanalytic theories and in the literature for many years (Neumann & Gamble, 1995), the more contemporary perspective involves the spontaneous or evoked responses of the therapist regarding information provided, behaviours exhibited, and emotions displayed by traumatized clients (Danieli, 1996).

Vicarious Trauma. Transformation of the inner experience of the therapist that comes as a result of empathic engagement with clients’ traumatic material (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Vicarious traumatization includes negative cognitive schemas and behavioural changes in therapists.

Secondary Traumatic Stress. The natural, consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about traumatizing events experienced by significant others, the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help traumatized or suffering people (Figley, 1995a).

Compassion Fatigue. The concept was first noted regarding burnout in nurses exposed to traumatic, work-related experiences (Joinson, 1992). Compassion fatigue is a natural consequence of working with people who have experienced extremely stressful events. Compassion fatigue develops as a result of exposure to traumatized individuals, coupled with empathy that is experienced for those individuals. Figley suggests that the term “compassion fatigue,” which is a “secondary traumatic stress disorder,” can be used interchangeably with the term secondary traumatic stress by those who feel uncomfortable with the latter term (Figley, 1995a; Salston & Figley, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the label of *secondary traumatic stress* will be used to identify this construct.

Empirical Research

In 1994, just prior to the publication of the books on secondary traumatic stress, a study was conducted to explore the impact of providing services to sexual abuse victims, and the role of personal trauma history on professionals’ responses to these victims (Follette et al., 1994). In this study, 225 mental health professionals and 46 law enforcement officers who provided services to child sexual abuse survivors were surveyed using a number of self-report questionnaires. Findings indicated that 70% of individuals from both groups experienced high levels of personal stress. Higher levels of trauma symptoms, general distress and PTSD symptoms were experienced by the law enforcement officers. In both groups, individuals with personal trauma history reported significantly higher levels of trauma-specific symptoms than those without trauma histories. In addition, the law enforcement group had more sexual assault investigations on their caseloads and used more negative coping methods than their mental health counterparts. These findings suggest that both groups would benefit from training in prevention of secondary traumatic stress. However, since the findings relied exclusively upon self-reports, caution should be exercised when interpreting these results. In addition, the majority of law enforcement respondents were male, which may limit the generalizabilty of these findings to female officers. Despite these cautions, it seems likely that law enforcement officers, in particular, would benefit from further education and training on (a) the risks inherent in these types of investigations, and (b) the benefits of employing positive coping strategies.

Pearlman and McIan (1995) conducted a study to explore relationships between aspects of trauma therapy and vicarious traumatization in a group of 136 female and 52 male trauma therapists. Their findings suggested that those with the least experience conducting therapy experienced the most psychological difficulties, as measured by the Traumatic Stress Inventory (TSI) Belief Scale, the Impact of Events Scale (IES) and the Symptom Checklist – 90. As in the Follette et al. (1994) study, Pearlman and McIan found that therapists with personal trauma histories showed more disruption as a result of the work than those without, specifically in the area of “other esteem.” The investigators also found that therapists who discussed the effects of their trauma work in personal therapy showed the most disturbances on both general and trauma-specific measures. The results should be viewed with caution, however, because the participants were all self-selected. The findings suggest a need for more training in trauma therapy, and more supervision and support for newer trauma therapists and those who, themselves, are trauma survivors.

Schauben and Frazier (1995) examined the impact of working with sexual violence survivors, the impact of past trauma histories in counsellors, and the strategies used by these therapists. Data from 148 respondents were analyzed. Counsellors who had higher percentages of survivors on their caseloads reported more disrupted beliefs, more PTSD symptoms and more self-reported vicarious trauma. They did not find significant relationships between counsellors’ past histories of victimization, and PTSD symptomatology. Counsellors reported the following helpful coping strategies: exercise, healthy life style, getting support when needed, expressing their emotions, and figuring out ways to view difficult situations in more positive ways. One limitation of this study was that the participants were solely working with female victims of sexual violence. It is not known whether the same impact would be experienced by counsellors working with children or male victims, or by counsellors working with victims of other types of trauma.

Kassam-Adams (1995) surveyed 75 female and 25 male graduate-level psychotherapists with a wide range of exposure to sexual trauma issues, and found evidence that secondary traumatic stress was not linked to general occupational stress. She also found that gender (female), personal trauma history and exposure to sexually traumatized clients, were predictive of intrusion and arousal symptoms. These findings provide empirical support for the existence of vicarious traumatization, and have implications for further study regarding the role of therapist gender and personal trauma history (especially childhood trauma) as factors in the development of PTSD symptoms in therapists. Participants in this study also indicated there were positive aspects of doing trauma work, including personal growth, spiritual connection, hope, and respect for human resiliency.

A number of additional studies have been conducted on therapists who worked with victims of sexual assault or abuse. These findings are similar to those from earlier studies, indicating that working with victims of sexual assault or abuse leads to increased risk of developing secondary traumatic stress (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Ghahramanlou & Brodbeck, 2000; Steed & Bicknell, 2001). In Steed and Downing (1998), results from the analysis of a series of interviews revealed that all of the therapists in their study experienced vicarious trauma. In addition, many of the therapists also reported experiencing positive changes in their worldviews and spirituality, including greater self-awareness and fresh perspectives.

Researchers have expanded their study populations to include therapists working with sexual offenders, to determine if there were similarities in findings. Steed and Bicknell (2001) found that 46.2% of their sample of 46 female and 21 male therapists were at moderate or high risk for developing secondary traumatic stress. They also concluded that the least experienced therapists and the most experienced therapists were at the highest levels of risk for secondary traumatic stress. Regarding why this might be the case, results of previous literature have suggested that newer therapists are more vulnerable, not having had the opportunity to develop any protection from the material. More experienced therapists are at higher risk because the effects of secondary traumatic stress appear to be cumulative across time and clients.

Way, VanDeusen, Martin, Applegate and Jandle (2004), assessed a sample of male and female clinicians who treated survivors of sexual abuse (*n* = 95) and offenders (n = 252). While they found that levels of vicarious trauma for participants in their sample fell within the normal clinical range, they discovered that shorter length of time providing sexual abuse treatment was a predictor of greater intrusive trauma for those treating survivors. They found that traumatic effects were positively associated with greater use of both positive and negative personal coping strategies, and that clinician groups did not differ in levels of vicarious trauma symptoms. A study of therapists working with adolescent sex offenders in Oregon yielded similar findings (Kraus, 2005). Kraus found that self-care did not significantly influence compassion fatigue or burnout, but did appear to influence compassion satisfaction.

Researchers have also examined the impact of working with victims of domestic violence, and found similar outcomes. An interpretive phenomenological analysis of 13 female and five male counsellors of domestic violence from Australia found that almost all of the counsellors reported experiencing vicarious trauma, changes to their emotional and physical health, their worldviews, and cognitive schemas (Iliffe & Steed, 2000).

Jenkins and Baird (2002) studied 99 sexual assault and domestic violence counsellors (95 women and 4 men) in an effort to understand the similarities and differences between vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress. Almost half of the sample (46%) consisted of volunteer workers. The researchers identified differences and similarities in how vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress are experienced. As a result, the authors suggested using the TSI-BSL and the Compassion Fatigue/Secondary Trauma Checklist (CFST-CL) together, to help distinguish between therapists coping with symptoms of secondary traumatic stress and those struggling with more cognitive impact.

Bell (2003) used a “strengths” perspective for research with 30 counsellors who worked with victims of domestic violence from five different agencies. Counsellors in the study generally presented a picture of strength and positive coping under stress. A number of counsellors identified feelings of satisfaction and meaning in their work. Less stressed counsellors used creative and resilient ways of looking at, and dealing with, different situations at home and at work. These findings suggest that the greater the sense of wellbeing, the lower the experiencing of symptoms of secondary traumatic stress.

A number of researchers have explored secondary traumatic stress in populations of child welfare (or protection) workers. Results of these studies were strikingly similar to the studies of therapists working with sexual assault or abuse, sexual offenders and domestic violence. They revealed that secondary traumatic stress symptoms were common, including nightmares, intrusive thoughts, images, distress, anxiety, and anger, especially in those who had witnessed the deaths of children. Workers who had experienced more previous trauma in their own lives reported being more depressed, anxious, somatic, withdrawn, isolated and distressed than those who had not (Dane, 2000; Meyers & Cornille, 2002). Nelson-Gardell (2003) found that a history of prior trauma, childhood abuse or neglect increased workers' risk for experiencing secondary traumatic stress.

Therapists who work with survivors of other types of trauma also seem to be at higher risk of developing secondary traumatic stress. Arvay and Uhlemann (1996) studied levels of stress in 161 randomly sampled counsellors. Counsellors experiencing high levels of stress were most likely to be in their 40s, with education below masters degrees, employed in community agencies as opposed to private practice, with less than 10 years experience and caseloads of between 10 – 26 survivors per week. The researchers also found that those experiencing stress perceived they had too many traumatized clients and felt their caseloads were very intense. These participants indicated they were frequently impacted by their clients' traumatic material.

Collins and Long (2003) obtained data from a multidisciplinary trauma and recovery team dealing with the Omagh bombing on August 15, 1998 in Northern Ireland. Levels of compassion fatigue and burnout increased over the first year, while levels of compassion satisfaction, satisfaction with life, and life status decreased. Creamer (2005) examined the correlates of secondary traumatic stress reactions in a study of disaster mental health workers who responded to those affected most by the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. They found that higher levels of secondary traumatic stress were associated with working (a) with highly traumatized individuals, (b) child clients,

(c) clients who discussed morbid material, (d) heavier prior trauma caseloads, and (e) workers who had less experience or were younger.

Beaton, Murphy, Johnson and Nemuth (2004), studied a sample of urban fire fighters from the Pacific Northwest who were participating in a leadership intervention close to the time of the September 11 World Trade Centre attacks. They concluded that symptoms of secondary traumatic stress in the sample spiked one week after the attack, but had decreased by the one month mark required to receive a PTSD diagnosis. These findings suggest that immediate, post-event coping or defences were strong enough to initiate recovery from the spike. Limitations of this study include the inability to assess the degree to which the leadership intervention may have affected the self-report of secondary traumatic stress responses. The study also relied exclusively upon self-report measures. In addition, fire fighters may have been responding to reactions from triggered past experiences or impact from watching media reports of the event.

In a study of secondary traumatic stress in attorneys working with victims of domestic violence and criminal defendants, it was found that attorneys demonstrated significantly higher levels of secondary traumatic stress and burnout than the control groups of social workers and mental health providers (Levin & Griesberg, 2003).

Ortlepp and Friedman (2002) conducted a study on 130 South African bank employees who worked as non-professional trauma counsellors in addition to their regular banking duties. Individuals did not report high scores on symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, possibly because of restrictions placed on the number of incidents and the number of clients per incident they were allowed to be involved with. The counsellors did, however, report higher scores for compassion satisfaction. The authors suggested one explanation for this finding was that employees felt satisfaction helping others, and role satisfaction may mitigate secondary traumatic stress. The perceived effectiveness of the training, commitment, and the trauma coordinator all played a critical role in the positive experience of this group.

Hope (2006) conducted a study to explore relationships between personal meaning, satisfaction with life, and incidence of secondary traumatic stress in a group of professional care givers. Participants included nurses, police officers, victim services workers and transition house staff. Of interest, 51% of the respondents were experiencing significant stress at home, and that experience of stress carried over into their working environments. It was found that a sense of meaning in life contributes to higher levels of wellbeing when exposed to secondary traumatic stress. Results also indicated that secondary traumatic stress increased as satisfaction with life and sense of personal meaning decreased. Higher personal meaning scores correlated with higher satisfaction with life and lower secondary traumatic stress. These results support Ortlepp and Friedman’s (2002) findings, and suggest that personal or life satisfaction may act as a buffer or aid in the prevention of secondary traumatic stress.

Keats (2005) explored the concept of vicarious witnessing in four Second World War concentration and extermination camps in Poland and Germany. Relevant to ICE work is the fact that participants in this study were exposed to graphic and potentially traumatizing images. Five participants with graduate level education were selected on the basis of their interest in attending the “Bearing Witness Retreat.” Over the course of the study, participants witnessed the atrocities of the Holocaust through photographs, artistic images, survivor stories, and physical artefacts. They were asked to construct written, spoken and visual narrative perspectives before, during, and after visiting the camps. Through this powerful vicarious witnessing experience, participants identified that once they had witnessed the atrocities and horrifying images, they felt a need to become active informers rather than passive observers. They identified emotional, physical, cognitive, social and spiritual risks from observing, listening, imagining and reporting what they witnessed. Participants experienced a range of emotional, physical, and spiritual reactions similar to symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. Through their process they identified the importance of the group as a touchstone to talk about their experiences. They also identified the importance of connecting with what was familiar in daily activities and of knowing when to withdraw or distance themselves, when they reached "witnessing saturation points." Participants found they accumulated knowledge with each camp until the stories became more familiar, believable and horrible. The process added to their ability to imagine the terror and dreadfulness of life in the camps.

In her study, Keats (2005) identified a construct she called "after image" (re-experiencing the phenomenon). She proposed that the imagination is enhanced and developed in specific ways, from seeing pictures, hearing stories and visiting the physical sites of past traumatic events. This after image may provide opportunities to process what might have been missed during the original experience, both physically and psychologically. Keats recommended further studies on the imaginative processes, and their links to secondary traumatization and posttraumatic stress. Keats' findings in this new area of research (vicarious witnessing) provides insight into experiences of ICE unit members, as they too witness graphic images to facilitate their investigations.

Policing Research

To understand police officer populations, a number of factors should be considered. First, police culture has unique challenges. New recruits often enter policing with high ideals and desires to help others. Given the importance of their roles, they often make personal commitments to solve crimes in order to vindicate victims and protect society. They also often feel pressure from society, and place pressure on themselves, to battle injustice and right the wrongs committed by others.

In order to accomplish this, they often assume dual roles. They are expected to act personably, but in a professional, detached manner. Rather than becoming personally involved when dealing with difficult situations, they must remain objective. Their effectiveness will be compromised if they fail to maintain this distinction (Pogrebin & Poole, 1991, Reiser & Geiser, 1984). Empathy is needed to deal with victims' families and yet emotional hardening is required for self-preservation.

For self-preservation, police officers can become highly adept at dissociating from the emotion of intense circumstances in an effort to maintain professionalism and control. Dissociation is a fairly normal coping strategy in the face of overwhelming stress, but extreme dissociative tendencies may be pathological. Several research studies suggest that having dissociative experiences at the moment of trauma is the strongest predictor of the development of post traumatic stress disorder (van der Kolk et al., 1996). Bryant, Moulds and Guthrie (2001) conducted a study on cognitive strategies and resolution of acute stress disorder. Avoidant cognitive coping during the acute phase of a traumatic incident was associated with Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), and 80% of individuals diagnosed with ASD later developed chronic PTSD. They also found evidence that counteracting avoidance through prolonged exposure to traumatic memories leads to the resolution of ASD. There is a potential for police officers who routinely use dissociation as a coping mechanism to inadvertently place themselves at higher risk of developing post traumatic stress disorder. In addition, the regular use of dissociation to cope with exposure to intense emotional experiences may increase the likelihood that it becomes a method of coping with even the most minor of stressors, preventing the individual from truly being present in their world (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1989).

In a study of Australian police, it was found that officers in stressful situations were more likely to employ direct action strategies that did not deal with emotional aspects of stressors (Evans et al., 1993). Police officers learn how to disengage and suppress their emotions in order to remain professional and carry out their duties.

Over time, an unsympathetic press, lack of community support, and sacrifice of the goals of justice to ensure system efficiency, may transform some of these idealistic officers into hardcore cynics. Constant exposure to human pain and misery, and unwavering giving of themselves, can lead to feelings of helplessness. Because of what they see (violence, deceit, human misery), posttraumatic stress symptoms may lead to breakdowns in normal coping mechanisms (Violanti & Gehrke, 2004).

Secondary Traumatic Stress in Policing

Terms such as *occupational stress* and *PTSD* are more common in policing research than the terms *vicarious trauma* and *secondary traumatic stress*, although these terms are beginning to emerge in policing literature. For the purpose of this study, the term *secondary traumatic stress* will be used to define the natural consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from (a) knowledge about traumatizing events experienced by significant others, and (b) helping or wanting to help traumatized or suffering people (Figley, 1995a). The following studies have been included because the concepts incorporated are consistent with that definition of secondary traumatic stress, although often the specific language of the researchers will be used when reporting their results.

Most police forces have developed specialized units responsible for the investigation of specific crime types. Investigators may be assigned on a full time basis to a Drug, Organized Crime, Street Enforcement, Robbery, Sexual Offence, Homicide or Internet Child Exploitation unit. Over time, investigators develop specific expertise as a result of directed training and experience investigating these particular crime types. As with therapists working with victims and offenders of sexual assault, child abuse and domestic violence, these investigators are continually exposed to the details of these traumas, spending significant amounts of time interviewing victims and offenders, and hearing countless stories of human suffering and cruelty. A review of the policing literature was conducted to determine whether police officers investigating serious and violent crimes also experienced symptoms and were impacted similarly to therapists working with traumatized clients.

Empirical Research

According to Martin et al. (1986), exposure to traumatized victims of a sexual assault may result in police officers becoming secondary victims of incidents. Following exposure to psychological traumas on the job, events relating to their own victimization, or working with victims of rape, spouse abuse or child abuse, 26% of their police officer sample reported symptoms meeting the criteria for PTSD. The investigators found that female officers were more likely to report these symptoms than men. As the authors do not provide an explanation for this gender difference, it is unclear whether females were experiencing greater frequency of symptoms or were simply more comfortable talking about how they were impacted than their male counterparts.

Follette et al. (1994) compared mental health and law enforcement professionals' responses to current and past trauma experiences and exposure to traumatic client material. In their law enforcement sample of 46 trained investigative police officers, they discovered that the incidence of PTSD increased when they were dealing with rape victims. They found that law enforcement professionals were significantly more distressed than mental health workers on all measures of psychological symptoms. Law enforcement officers with personal histories of trauma tended to have significantly higher proportions of child sexual abuse investigations on their caseloads made greater use of both negative and positive coping strategies than non-abused law enforcement officers. Their findings suggest that personal stress, personal trauma history, and negative responses to investigating sexual abuse cases were predictive of trauma symptoms. Although these researchers were unable to explain precisely why there were such differences between the two groups of professions, results of their study provided new information regarding the impact of providing services to sexual abuse survivors. The study also supports the findings that exposure to traumatized victims places police officers at risk of becoming secondary victims (Martin et al., 1986).

Using a sample of 527 Australian police officers, Hart et al. (1995) found that police officers reported less psychological distress and greater wellbeing than the average person in the community. These responses indicated that officers could be both satisfied and dissatisfied at the same time, citing child abuse investigations as an example. Officers may experience psychological distress regarding the nature of the investigation, but also feel satisfaction from being able to do something about such situations. It is interesting to note that participants indicated they felt satisfaction as a result of having an impact in these situations (e.g., prosecution, prevention, locating victims). As has been suggested in previous studies, it is possible that being able to take action in difficult situations or finding personal meaning or satisfaction in the work (compassion satisfaction), may mitigate the development of secondary traumatic stress (Hope, 2006;

Stamm, 2005).

Further support for the notion that child abuse investigations can be personally impacting comes from a study by Lea, Auburn, and Kibblewhite (1999), where police officers, probation officers and psychologists working with sexual offenders were interviewed about their experiences and reactions to the work. Results of this study revealed that there was vulnerability among these professionals. Some revealed suffering from personal feelings evoked by certain cases where victims were the same ages and genders as their own children.

A study of 601 police officers (226 female and 367 male) from a large English police force identified that, for women, the presence of children seemed to be a critical factor in their likelihood of crossing the distress threshold. This was increased by a factor of almost three compared with women having no children (Brown et al., 1999). Researchers also explored the differences between traumatic, vicarious and routine operational stressors. They found that low frequency, high impact stressors (death, disasters) have been associated with officers being at risk for developing PTSD. With regard to sexual crimes, researchers found that although dealing with rape victims is more routine, the impact of such exposure is more similar to traumatic incidents where police officers are the primary victims.

Sewell (1994) explored the lived experiences of homicide detectives in his qualitative study. Most investigators interviewed felt an awesome burden due to the nature of the work and the importance society places on solving these crimes. In addition to personal and societal pressure, the investigators carry a sense of obligation to the families of these victims. Sewell noted several other factors that increased the difficulty of the work, including the requirement for the job to take priority over other commitments, which strains family and social relationships. Also, the length and complexity of investigations, court proceedings, and appeals may delay any sense of gratification. There are additional stressors associated with interagency rivalry when several jurisdictions are present. Workload may limit the scope and length of the investigations, creating a level of frustration and anger. Investigators are constantly exposed to violence, potentially leading to feelings that society is lawless. Finally, homicide investigators may experience fatigue due to the physical and emotional demands placed upon them.

Hallett (1996) examined the impact of vicarious trauma on homicide and child sexual abuse detectives using a cross-sectional correlational design with 126 law enforcement officers from 14 agencies in the United States. This study highlighted the deeply personal reactions of officers and detectives to the trauma they see, and the struggle against knowing or acknowledging these reactions. Law enforcement officers routinely employed coping strategies such as hyper vigilance, repression, denial, isolation, humour and dissociation. Homicide and child sexual abuse units had high exposure to trauma and violence, which put detectives at risk for pathology and distress. Hallett found that individuals with a childhood history of violence, combined with high exposure to violence were at particular risk of distress.

Holmberg (2004) conducted a study using written interviews with 430 Swedish special squad police officers (112 women, 318 men). In this study he explored the impact on investigators of working with victims and offenders of serious and violent crimes. During the interviews participants were asked to rate their psychological stress levels on a seven point Likert scale, and indicate for the presence or absence of specific psychological reactions. In the categories of stressful events, the most frequent categories reported involved working on investigative units such as homicide investigation teams, investigating child killings or killings of police officers. The highest stress rates were associated with investigations into child homicide or sexual abuse cases, including interviewing abused or maltreated children (i.e., sexually abused or assaulted children). Holmberg found that (a) helping traumatized survivors, (b) exposure to their narratives, and (c) feelings of empathy were all associated with the development of secondary traumatic stress. According to Holmberg, daily exposure to suffering and painful experiences of others creates stress in professionals. Investigators of violent and sexual crimes such as homicide, aggravated assault and rape constitute extreme stress, particularly when such stressful exposures completely occupy the daily lives of investigators. Holmberg identified these investigators as being at high risk of becoming vicariously traumatized by their work.

Clarkson (2006) studied the effects of sexual assault investigations on the sex offence investigator in her mixed methods study of RCMP sexual offence investigators. She found that there were a number of factors unique to sexual crimes. First was the nature of the crime – the personal violation of the crime itself evokes an empathetic response from the investigator. Continuous interaction with victims and the lack of recovery time between investigations result in greater emotional impact on the investigator. Another factor was the prevalence of child victims, with younger victims having an even greater impact on the investigators. The final identified factor was the stigma associated with working on a sex crimes unit – many of the members experienced a lack of appreciation and understanding for the work they did. Participants identified they were impacted by their work in the following ways: (a) they often felt incredible empathy for the victim, especially children; (b) they became more aware of the prevalence of sexual crimes, and came to suspect that they were seeing just the tip of the iceberg; (c) they felt more emotionally invested, thinking of and feeling responsible for their victims even during time off; (d) they experienced an increase in cynicism and distrust of others; and (e) many found the work negatively affected their sleep, concentration, energy level, and general stress. Fifty-three percent of the respondents indicated they were impacted by their workload, and 50% became more protective of children. Clarkson recommended policing agencies (a) develop mandatory debriefing sessions and psychological assessment processes for their investigators; (b) encouraged an inoculation process to familiarize investigators with the work and impact on them; and (c) stressed the need for supervisors and managers to understand the job of a sexual assault investigator and how to best support their investigators – paying specific attention to workload, work tasks (provide opportunities to vary the type of work without increasing the workload), training and psychological support. Clarkson also stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy life balance, often challenging for those required to be on call.

It is clear from the research that investigations of serious and violent offences can take their toll on police investigators. Similar to the results of research with therapists, police officers working with victims of sexual assault and child abuse appear to be at higher risk for developing secondary traumatic stress.

Integrated Child Exploitation Studies

ICE members primarily investigate crimes involving the sexual exploitation and sexual assault of children. Although no research has been published to date on the impact of working on these units, research is beginning to emerge on the prevalence of internet child exploitation and the challenges inherent in these investigations. In order to more fully understand the responsibilities of ICE unit investigators the focus of this literature review will now be narrowed to the studies most relevant to Integrated Child Exploitation units.

The "E" Division Integrated Child Exploitation (ICE) team coordinates and/or leads all child exploitation investigations involving suspects who cross the threshold to become priority targets. The ultimate goal of the unit is to identify and assist child victims of sexual abuse, identify those responsible for the abuse, and lay appropriate criminal charges for the assaults, creation of the images, and their distribution (Gray, 2006).

Ninety-nine percent of the child exploitation investigations conducted by this unit involve the internet. Offences include child pornography, voyeurism, internet luring (using the computer to meet children for sexual gratification), sexual tourism, and prostitution online. Referrals to this busy unit are from the National Child Exploitation Coordination Center (NCECC), Cybertip, FBI, Interpol, Homeland Security and local police departments (J. Gray, personal communication, May 4, 2006). Although there are no empirical studies published on the impact of working on an ICE unit, some studies provide information about the types of work ICE investigators are required to do and the kinds of issues they must face. The following studies provide glimpses into internet child exploitation investigations.

In addition to exposure to graphic images of child sexual abuse, ICE investigators face a variety of other challenges. D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003) outlined a number of issues facing internet investigators, in their review of New York City Police Department records from 1996 – 2000. They found that the technical features of the internet and procedural issues with the law presented significant problems for those investigators.

There were further issues relating to jurisdiction, global reach and the instantaneous nature of computer-mediated communication. Differences in statutory definitions of the laws by geographical region may also complicate investigations. Finally, the continued development and increased availability, of anonymizing internet tools can complicate investigations, because they make perpetrators more difficult to locate.

Almost all Canadian children have some access to the World Wide Web, according to a 2005 Canadian survey of 5,272 children and youth from grades four to eleven (Media Awareness Network, 2006). Data collected from the survey revealed that 94% of students had home internet access in 2005 compared to 79% in 2001. Of those, 37% have their own personal internet connection. In addition, 23% of the participants had their own cell phone (44% with internet capability, 56% with text messaging, and 17% with cameras). Additionally, 22% of the participants said they had their own web cam, increasing to 31% by grade eleven. The use of instant messaging was a popular activity with 28% using instant messaging daily in grade four. The number significantly increased to 43% by grade five, and 86% by grade eleven. Household rules about internet use were found to have increased from 2001 to 2005, perhaps suggesting more parental awareness about internet safety. In the 2005 study, 74% of households had a rule preventing the youth from meeting with online acquaintances in person, up from 54% in 2001. Unfortunately, kids in grades eight and nine reported having 33% fewer rules, suggesting a relaxation of parental involvement in internet use at precisely the time when they are more likely to make friends on line or visit inappropriate sites.

The National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) Study was conducted to obtain a sense of the scope of law enforcement activity, and to serve as a baseline for monitoring the growth of internet sex crimes against minors. Data from investigations conducted by 2,270 state, county and local law enforcement agencies showed that 83% of offenders had images depicting children between the ages of six and twelve. Over 80% possessed images that depicted penetration of a minor, 71% possessed images depicting sexual contact between an adult and a minor, and 21% of offenders had child pornography depicting violence beyond sexual assaults, such as bondage, rape, or torture (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2003).

Mitchell et al. (2003) also found that 79% of investigations in their sample had two or more agencies participating in their investigations and 45% had three or more. Because of the universal character of the internet, victims, offenders and investigators are frequently in different locations. Possession of child pornography was an element in at least 65% of all internet sex crimes against minors.

Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2005) found that the internet may be affecting the dynamics of sexual abuse that occurs at the hands of family members and acquaintances. Using data from specific victim and offender profiles from the N-JOV study, they found that 20% of all arrests for internet crimes involved family members or acquaintances. More family offenders were from small towns, while more acquaintances were from urban areas. The internet was used in five ways in the commission of these crimes:

1. Seduction or grooming (67%).
2. Child pornography production (43%).
3. Arranging meetings and other communications (6% of family, 43% of acquaintance).
4. Rewarding victims (8% acquaintance).
5. Advertising or selling victims (2%).

The types of sexual assault perpetrated by these offenders included:

1. Intercourse or other penetration (45%).
2. Child pornography production or transmitting pornography online to a victim (21%).
3. Fondling (15%).
4. Oral sex (8%).
5. Inappropriate touching (7%).
6. Other (2%).

The length of time the crimes continued before becoming known to police:

1. One month or less (23%).
2. One to six months (19%).
3. Six months to 1 year (23%).
4. More than 1 year (24%).

As most crimes go unreported, it is not possible to accurately predict the prevalence of this problem. However, this study does provide insight into ways the internet is being used in the commission of sexual offences against children.

The National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre (NCECC) released findings from its Internet Based Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Environmental Scan (Sinclair & Sugar, 2005). This Canadian study cited data indicating that 64% of Canadian households accessed the internet from home, work, school, a public library or other location in 2003 (Statistics Canada, 2003). Given the continued use of the internet, this percentage is likely even higher today. There were no Canadian victimization statistics available, so they were unable to identify information specific to internet related crime.

Sinclair and Sugar (2005) identified challenges associated with the multi-jurisdictional and multi-national nature of these investigations. They highlighted the fact that the abuse conducted through the dissemination of child sexual abuse images becomes a permanent record of the sexual abuse of the child. Through chat rooms, peer-to-peer file transfers and other mediums, child sexual abuse images are traded, sold and/or purchased. Stanley (2001) cites research claiming there are approximately 14 million pornographic websites with some posting approximately one million child abuse images. Between 23,000 and 40,000 sites advertise chat rooms that defend child-adult sexual relationships. The introduction of morphed, virtual and pseudo child sexual abuse images creates new challenges. As technology continues to improve, it will become increasingly difficult to differentiate between real and virtual images (illegal in Canada – but not everywhere).

Sinclair and Sugar (2005) indicate that a key component of internet-based child sexual exploitation investigations involves identifying the victims. The authors state, "Crimes of this nature are very intense overall, but one of the most difficult tasks to complete relates to victim identification because of the very nature of the crime" (p.5). This critical and extremely difficult task falls to ICE team members.

Responsibilities of the ICE team include viewing graphic images of child sexual abuse, identifying victims, working with victims and their families, identifying and locating perpetrators, and conducting thorough investigations that will hold up in court. Multi-jurisdictional investigations, increasing technology, and the enormous scope and prevalence of these crimes all contribute to the challenges they experience. Extrapolating from previous research, it is likely that the duties of the ICE team place them at higher risk for developing secondary traumatic stress, although certain factors may mitigate the risk. To understand some of these factors, it is important to explore relevant research in the area of coping.

The next section includes highlights of coping literature, initially to define what *coping* is, and then to examine studies related to police and coping, and secondary traumatic stress and coping.

Coping Theory

Coping refers to an individual's attempt to deal adaptively with stress. The outcome of these attempts is known as "adaptation" (Alexander, Feeney, Hohaus, & Noller, 1998). Stress is caused by a relationship between the person and the environment where demands tax or exceed the person's resources. Once a situation is determined to be stressful, coping processes are brought into play to manage the troubled person – environment relationship (Folkman, 1990). Coping can be defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The process of coping allows individuals the opportunity to use their skills to manage the difficulties in life. Lazarus (2000) emphasized individual differences and processes centered in a holistic outlook. One of the most significant factors associated with determining the impact of a stressor is the person-environment relationship, and its meaning to the individual (Lazarus). Coping techniques tend to change with time, experience and the nature of the stressor. Individuals will react to different stressors with different coping responses, depending upon their evaluations of the stressors. Differences in coping may be a result of an individual's judgment about what is at stake in specific stressful situations, termed *primary appraisal,* and what they view as options for coping, referred to as *secondary appraisal* (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986).

In their theory, Folkman and Lazarus (1985) define two coping principles:

Problem focused coping refers to strategies used to change or manage the source of stress (to make them less stressful). *Emotion-focused coping* strategies are used to manage emotions. Research results indicate that individuals employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in virtually every stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 2000).

Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) defined actions for adaptive and maladaptive coping. Adaptive coping includes behaviours such as: (a) active coping (taking action, exerting efforts to remove or circumvent the stressor), (b) planning (thinking about how to confront the stressor by planning one's active coping efforts), (c) seeking instrumental social support (seeking assistance, information or advice about what to do), (d) seeking emotional social support (obtaining sympathy or emotional support from someone), and (e) positive reinterpretation and growth (making the best of the situation by growing from it or seeing it from a more positive light). Maladaptive coping strategies include: (a) focusing on, and venting of emotions (b) denial (trying to reject the reality of the stressful situation), (c) mental disengagement (psychological disengagement from the situation through daydreaming, sleep or self destruction), and (d) substance use (using alcohol or other drugs in order to disengage from the stressors).

Anschel (2000) introduced a conceptual model specifically for coping with stressors associated with police-work. This model was developed in recognition of the unique and unpleasant sources of stress not experienced by other members of the community. Anschel developed his model to reflect both adaptive and maladaptive cognitive appraisals and coping strategies. Anschel's coping model begins with an officer's perception of an event. This requires the officer to interpret the event or stimulus in a process called "cognitive appraisal." Through a filtering process the officer must arrive at decisions regarding the meaning of the event and how he or she will respond to it. It is at this point that the officers' coping responses are activated, depending upon the officers appraisal of the situation. The officer can select "no coping" or "coping" strategies. Coping strategies are divided into either an "approach" or "avoidance category", and each of those categories is further broken into "behavioural" or "cognitive" coping (doing or thinking).

Anschel indicates that each of the decisions will be influenced by a number of personal factors, including coping style, confidence, self-esteem, optimism, hardiness, extraversion, neuroticism, and perfectionism. Individual perceptions of the stressor will combine with personal factors to determine the police officer's response.

All three of the above-referred models of coping suggest that both personal factors and the meaning of the stressor to the individual, influence coping responses. This suggests that stressors must be viewed in context. Individual's responses to stressors tend to change with time, experience and the nature of the stressors. The operational definition of healthy coping used in the current study was "maintaining physical, psychological and emotional health." Each participant subjectively determined their level of healthy coping for themselves.

Coping and Police Studies

To function effectively and maintain their professionalism in the face of stressors at work, police officers often learn to detach, disengage, and achieve intimacy without emotion (Sewell, 1994). Over time, it becomes easier to suppress the pain and tragedy that is witnessed, rather than try to face it. As a result, some of the coping methods employed may serve to increase stress levels rather than lessen them. Officers may develop qualities such as suspiciousness, cynicism, authoritarianism, and aloofness as means of coping with occupational stresses (Evans, Coman, Stanley & Burrows, 1993).

What can be done to improve investigators resources so they cope more effectively? Positive methods of coping are identified in many studies. Follette et al. (1994) found that education related to sexual abuse, supervision, consultation and humour were the most frequently endorsed coping responses used by professionals. They recommended peer support networks, employee assistance programs, and personal therapy to reduce the negative impact of work related stressors.

In a study of 500 senior police officers from the United Kingdom, 90% of officers indicated they coped with stress by planning ahead, dealing with problems immediately, setting priorities, having stable relationships and trying to deal with situations objectively (Brown, Cooper, & Kirkcaldy, 1996). Researchers recommended applying stress and coping management programs from the private sector to policing, with appropriate adaptations.

Burke (1998) conducted a study designed to shed more light on coping resources among a large sample of Canadian police officers (375 males and 16 females). Definitions of coping applied in this study were: “active coping” (being proactive, taking charge, being instrumental, remaining attentive and vigilant, and confronting) and “escapist coping” (escaping, avoiding, engaging in palliative self-care, and reacting emotionally). It was found that that Type A personalities reported greater use of active coping, and less use of escapist coping. Interestingly, those predisposed to Type A personalities also experienced greater work or family conflict and more psychosomatic symptoms. Police officers reporting more work stressors made greater use of escapist coping reported more work or family conflict and less job satisfaction. Burke suggested that, given the results of his study, there appeared to be benefit in providing educational interventions designed to improve coping resources.

Leonard and Alison (1999) conducted a study on the impact of critical incident stress debriefings (CISDs) on coping strategies and anger levels in a sample of 60 male police officers from Australia. Results from the study indicated that individuals who received CISDs did not employ more adaptive coping strategies; however they scored higher on active coping and positive reinterpretation and growth. Researchers in this study found that officers who were involved in other negative life events 12 months prior to the traumatic incident were more vulnerable to maladaptive coping. Results of this research suggest that negative life events deplete resources for coping. This highlights the importance of becoming aware of the officers' vulnerability to stress prior to traumatic police incidents.

Violanti (1999) claims that the incidence of alcohol abuse in policing is almost double that in the general population. One concern for police officers is that constant exposure to human suffering, stress, pressure and isolation may lead to break-downs in normal coping mechanisms. Violanti found that because the effects of stress are cumulative, officers exposed to many stressors may reach breaking points, and suggested strategies to (a) improve mental and physical fitness, (b) provide lifestyle education, (c) reduce stress, (d) encourage a sense of control, (e) educate supervisors and family members about symptoms of alcohol abuse, and (f) promote early detection and intervention (Violanti, 1995).

Sewell's (1994) study with homicide investigators resulted in both short and long term strategies. According to participants, there was a need to maintain distance from emotional responses. Preparing for the work by viewing graphic slides and videos assisted in desensitizing investigators and allowed them to acquire the beginnings of *protective shells*. Dark comedy also helped investigators distance themselves from their emotions. Sewell cited the uniqueness of police vocabulary and the use of it in communication and short hand (bodies depersonalized as “stiffs”; individuals are not killed, they are “wasted” or “smoked” etc...). According to Sewell, it was the belief in their roles that allowed those investigators to remain emotionally distanced and assert their professionalism. Such short-term coping strategies may assist investigators in managing their cases, but may lead to problems in the long run.

Sewell (1994) recommended the following long term strategies: (a) recognize individual as well as organizational needs, (b) emphasize individual stress management as needed, and (c) employ Critical Incident Stress Debriefings to prevent the development of the “impenetrable shell.” He recommended the use of psychologists and grief counsellors and encouraged proper stress management practices to prevent emotional and physiological damage. Sewell also suggested that police forces consider regular job rotation. He suggests units develop time frames for each position, and move individuals earlier if they see negative symptoms. He recommends rotating investigators from active duty to cold case squads, then on to administrative duty, and then moved back to active duty. Sewell also recommended the following, (a) training to help investigators understand the impact of their work prior to going onto new units, (b) techniques to mitigate the impact or control the stress associated with homicide investigations, and (c) education regarding the importance of proper diet, nutrition, exercise, and achieving life balance. Investigators must understand their physical, emotional and mental limits, and use emotional outlets outside of their professions. He stated that parallel training for significant others was critically important and advocated training other managers and supervisors because they need to both understand their roles in mitigating stress, and recognize symptoms and contributory factors. Sewell also suggested this training for other specialized units (i.e., child abuse, rape, robbery detectives and crime scene personnel). The stress of these jobs can not be eliminated, so researchers need to find the best ways to support those who do this difficult work, and contribute to the development of agency policies.

Van Patten and Burke (2001) investigated the impact of stress on child homicide detectives, and the effectiveness of critical incident stress debriefing for mitigating the impact of such stresses. Participants reported that crimes involving children were the most difficult for them to work with and maintain emotional and psychological equilibrium. Sixty-one participants, (55 males and 6 females), were recruited from FBI in-service training for investigators. The researchers found that participants exhibited more stress-related symptoms than those in a comparison group of psychologically healthy adults, reporting more stress than average citizens, but not so much that they had become significantly impaired. The biggest impact involved exposure to traumatic stimuli at the crime scene. The immediate investigation, (continuing involvement with bystanders, witnesses, and the ad hoc nature of the situation), limited logistical and administrative support at the scene, and persistent media pressures, were reported as the next most stressful aspects. Researchers were unable to evaluate the effectiveness of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) programs, because only 10% of the participants reported they had experienced a CISM program specifically for homicide investigations. Interestingly, 62% of participants recommend or strongly recommend CISM for homicide investigators.

Morley (2003), in his study of RCMP officers, found that seeing a psychologist as a requirement of duty was helpful to some of the participants. They found their visits to be reassuring and supportive (helping them comprehend the nature and impact of their work). Having a pre-existing relationship with a psychologist made it easier to access psychological support when they were having difficulties. Attending Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD) was beneficial and useful, because it reduced some symptoms. The fact that not receiving support when needed was described as hindering highlights the importance of having ready support systems in place for police officers.

In a study of Northern California law enforcement agencies, 254 employees (204 males and 50 females) were assessed for PTSD and job stress, coping, and personality, using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2). The investigators found that employees at greater risk for developing PTSD were more likely to use drugs and alcohol, behavioural and mental disengagement, and denial (Haisch & Meyers, 2004). The authors found that exposure to critical incidents on a regular basis slowly broke down employees' psychological resources, and placed them at risk for psychological damage. The authors recommended proactive responses, including attending to early signs of PTSD, and providing additional training in coping with stress.

Holmberg in his 2004 study described earlier, found that the most frequent coping mechanisms officers used to manage stressful situations were maintaining contact with fellow workers, mental preparation, humour, and thinking practically.

Cross and Ashley (2004), in their previously describe study, found the ability to cope with incidents depended upon past experiences with trauma, coping strategies for stress, availability of support networks, and recognition of the dangers of ignoring signs and symptoms of post-incident stress. The authors suggested that, in order for police to feel comfortable accessing counselling, psychologists must have an understanding of police work and the trauma and stresses unique to this work. They must understand the "dark humour" used to vent frustration and anxiety, and possess the ability to establish rapport, so members feel that trust and confidentiality are assured. The researchers recommended mental health teams, offsite EAP programs, and peer support teams. They also stressed the importance of teaching recruits about stress, dealing with traumatic incidents, understanding the negative effects of substance abuse, and the importance of early interventions.

Sheehan, Everly, and Langlieb (2004) conducted an analysis of interventions designed to assist police officers in coping with their work in 11 American policing agencies after the September 11 tragedy. They identified five core competencies:

1. Assessment and triage – knowing when to intervene, and when to support normal coping mechanisms.
2. Crisis intervention with individuals (assess unique personalities and histories, since everyone responds differently).
3. Small group crisis intervention.
4. Critical Incident Stress Debriefings.
5. Town hall meetings – including larger impacted populations.

Sheehan et al. also discussed the importance of pre-incident training, and "expectation management." With regard to the latter point, the authors stressed that officers must have accurate understandings of the work they will be doing prior to engaging in the work. They recommended exposing new officers to the realities of their duties early, to engender accurate expectations. This process may allow officers to develop protective psychological barriers between themselves and their work.

Thompson, Kirk and Brown (2005) outlined a stress prevention hierarchy involving primary, secondary and tertiary responses. The purpose of the primary response is to eliminate or reduce the source of stress. The purpose of the secondary response is to mitigate potential consequences of exposure, and the purpose of the tertiary response is to provide support for stressed officers.

Social support has consistently been found to affect psychological outcomes following experiences of trauma (Stephens & Long, 1999). It has been discovered that police officers traditionally build their safeguards by associating with each other, and using humour as a release mechanism (Herman, 1989). The importance of supervisor and peer support can not be underestimated. Stephens, Long and Miller (1997) found that peer support had the strongest negative relation to PTSD. Support was found to be beneficial in (a) reducing stress (Brown et al., 1999; Karlsson & Christianson, 2003), (b) helping officers remain engaged with their work (Morley, 2003), and (c) reducing the work stressors of role overload and role ambiguity and, consequently, emotional exhaustion in female officers (Thompson et al., 2005).

Integrating the Literature

One finding consistently supported in the literature is that secondary traumatic stress is a natural consequence of empathic engagement with those who are suffering (Sexton, 1999). The bulk of the researchers have explored this construct among counsellors and other mental health workers, with therapists of survivors of (a) sexual abuse (Follette et al., 1994; Ghahramanlou & Brodbeck, 2000; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Kassam-Adams, 1995; Schauben & Frazier, 1995; Steed & Downing, 1998; Way et al., 2004), (b) sexual assault offenders (Kraus, 2005; Steed & Bicknell, 2001; Way et al., 2004), (c) victims of domestic violence (Baird, 2003; Bell, 2003; Iliffe & Steed, 2000), and (d) victims of unspecified traumas (Collins, 2003; Creamer, 2005; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995). More recent studies have explored the concept of vicarious traumatization, burnout and secondary traumatic stress in data obtained from groups of fire fighters (Beaton et al., 2004), bank employees (Ortlepp & Friedman, 2002), and attorneys (Levin & Griesberg, 2003).

Policing studies have identified that the use of dissociation, and exposure to victims, offenders and their families in serious and violent criminal investigations places investigators at higher risk of developing secondary traumatic stress (Brown et al., 1999; Bryant et al., 2001; Clarkson, 2006; Follette et al., 1994; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Lea et al., 1999; Martin et al., 1986; Sewell, 1994; van der Kolk et al., 1996; van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1989).

Many of the concepts that have been identified in the literature suggest there are certain predictive factors that place individuals at higher risk of experiencing secondary traumatic stress. Variables that moderate the development of secondary traumatic stress include gender (Brown et al., 1999; Kassam-Adams, 1995), age (Ghahramanlou & Brodbeck, 2000), amount of exposure to traumatized clients (Kassam-Adams, 1995; Schauben & Frazier, 1995), length of time providing sexual abuse treatment (Creamer, 2005; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995; Steed & Bicknell, 2001), and clinicians' own maltreatment histories (Follette et al., 1994; Ghahramanlou & Brodbeck, 2000; Kassam-Adams, 1995; Meyers & Cornille, 2002; Nelson-Gardell, 2003; and Pearlman & MacIan, 1995).

Variables that mitigate the development of secondary traumatic stress include (a) access to clinical supervision and/or consultation (Brown et al., 1999; Clarkson, 2006; Follette et al., 1994; Karlsson & Christianson, 2003; Pearlman & McIan, 1995; Sewell, 1994; Stephens & Long, 1999; Violanti, 1999); (b) training for new and experienced clinicians, police officers, management and staff (Burke, 1998; Clarkson, 2006; Cross &

Ashley, 2004; Follette et al, 1994; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Pearlman & McIan, 1995; Sewell, 1994; Steed & Bicknell, 2001, Violanti, 1999); (c) self care strategies, professional and social support (Burke, 1998; Clarkson, 2006; Collins & Long, 2003; Dane 2000; Follette et al., 1994; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Iliffe & Steed, 2000; Morley, 2003; Schauben & Frazier, 1995; Sewell, 1994; Steed & Bicknell, 2001), and (d) organizational acknowledgement of secondary traumatic stress (Beaton et al., 2004; Clarkson, 2006; Collins and Long, 2003; Hallett, 1996; Hyman, 2004; Nelson-Gardell, 2003; Rasmussen, 2005; Salston and Figley, 2003; Sewell, 1994; Sexton, 1999; Sheehan et al., 2004; Way et al., 2004).

According to Figley (1995a), two of the most important yet least studied variables associated with the prevention or reduction of compassion fatigue are (a) a sense of satisfaction from working with traumatized individuals, and (b) an ability (or competence) in creating mental and physical distance between workers and the work including the clients with whom they work (Salston & Figley, 2003). These variables seem to be key aspect mitigating factors regarding the development of secondary traumatic stress. Other factors that appear to reduce the experience of secondary traumatic stress include: (a) good training specific to trauma work, (b) interpersonal resources of the worker, (c) regular supervision, (d) life-work balance, (e) social support, and (f) crisis intervention on a voluntary basis for workers who need it.

In summary, given the consistent research finding that secondary traumatic stress is a natural outcome for those who help others who are hurting, it is extremely important to expand research on this topic beyond mental health practitioners to other high-stress, people-helping professions, such as health professionals, firefighters, and police officers. It may also be useful to focus on specific work units and settings within these professions. To date, there have not been any studies to examine the impact of working on ICE teams. The intent of the current study was to extend understanding of the impact of working on an ICE unit, and identify specific factors that may help or hinder coping with this important work. Specifically, this study used a qualitative method, the Critical Incident Technique, to address the following research question: *“What helps and hinders coping with ICE work.”*

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the history, nature and evolution of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) will be described, along with the procedures for participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, and reliability and validation procedures. Since the researcher is such an important ingredient in any qualitative study, this chapter also contains information to situate the researcher within the research processes and procedures.

The Critical Incident Technique

CIT was an outgrowth from the Aviation Psychology program of the US Army Air Force in WW II. Flanagan (1954) developed CIT as a series of procedures that assisted in gathering facts in an objective fashion, with a minimum number of subjective inferences and interpretations. According to Flanagan, the classification of critical incidents is inductive. However, once a system has been developed, the researcher is able to be quite objective in placing incidents in defined categories. Over time, CIT has been modified and expanded for use with many psychological constructs. It is now applied to research in areas including nursing, job analysis, counselling, education and teaching, medicine, marketing, organizational learning, performance appraisal, psychology, and social work (Woolsey, 1986). While the focus of many of today's CIT studies is on phenomenological experiences and psychological states, and the approach to data collection has shifted from direct observation to semi-structured interviews and self reports, the general five-step process developed decades ago by Flanagan continues to be used.

CIT was originally developed within a positivist paradigm, with the intent of identifying and categorizing observable and measurable behaviours. The process of refining and expanding the technique to explore psychological states and inner experiences demonstrates the shift to a constructivist paradigm. Current CIT methodology acknowledges that data obtained during semi-structured interviews are elicited from participants' personal experiences and perceptions. It is understood within the constructivist paradigm that, while people appear to use a shared language, they do not necessarily interpret the same situations in the same ways (Birch et al., 2001). It follows that data collected using the CIT and subsequent knowledge claims that emerge from analysis of the data are recognized as the collective experiences of individual participants in the study, and generalizabilty of these knowledge claims is offered tentatively, allowing for (and acknowledging) individual differences among experiences and perceptions.

In current research usage, a critical incident can be defined as "an event which has significant positive or negative impact on the individual. This may involve three components which are: (a) antecedent conditions, (b) the event and (c) the consequence. Each of these components may include thoughts, feelings, behaviours and relationships" (Wong, 2000, p. 56). In order to correctly analyze and categorize these incidents, researchers must look not only at descriptions of the incident themselves, but also at "meaning units" that reflect the rich complexity involved in each critical incident (Wong, 2000). A hallmark of this methodology is that participants place value and importance on the data by selecting which incidents to recount to the researcher. The researcher, in turn, uses participants' language to categorize incidents, thereby minimizing researcher bias.

Flanagan (1954) outlined five main steps for CIT, including: (a) determining the general aim of the activity, (b) developing plans, specification and criteria for the information to be obtained, (c) collecting the data, (d) analyzing the thematic content of the data, and (e) interpreting and reporting the findings. Flanagan also asserted that the criterion for accuracy of reporting is the quality of incidents themselves. Use of the term "accuracy of reporting" reflects participants' subjective realities. If the details are full and precise, the researcher can assume the incident can be taken as accurate.

In CIT studies, sample size is typically determined by the number of critical incidents that are obtained, rather than the number of participants. The general rule, according to Woolsey (1986) is that incidents should be collected until redundancy appears. A researcher can assume redundancy has been achieved when, out of 100 incidents collected, there are only two or three incidents that have any new content.

In their review of the evolution of the CIT over the past 50 years Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson and Maglio (2005) claim that there have been four main departures from Flanagan's original use of CIT. They are:

1. A shift from observing behaviours to studying constructs and experiences.
2. A shift from direct observation of participants to retrospective self report.
3. A shift in belief that data analysis is entirely subjective to recognition that there are specific rules to follow, and that the hallmark of CIT is the formation of categories as a result of analysing the data.
4. A shift toward increased soundness of the data produced using CIT procedures that still allows for flexibility.

CIT as the Methodology of Choice

Other qualitative methodologies were considered for this study; however the CIT continually stood out as the methodology that best fit the requirements for this investigation for a number of reasons.

First, the desired outcome from this study included a list of recommendations to the RCMP for their consideration, and contribution to the sparse scholarly literature in this area. It is hoped that these recommendations will be considered when designing interventions and managing personnel in the ICE unit, with the goal of creating the optimum environment to facilitate the difficult work undertaken by these members. It is further hoped that these recommendations will be available to members who are contemplating joining, as well as those who are currently serving on the unit. These desired outcomes are not met as concisely and pragmatically by other methodologies.

CIT was also selected because it provides a relatively high level of safety for the participants. It was not my intent to delve into this unknown area and expose potentially deep wounds. CIT promotes psychological safety by focusing on incidents that helped team members cope. Participating in the interviews and speaking to individuals about what has helped them cope with the work assisted participants in developing greater personal awareness regarding psychological protection and safety. CIT was a great first approach that allowed a foundation to be built for future studies, while ensuring the least amount of intrusion and the greatest attention to the psychological safety of the participants.

A third reason is that CIT has evolved and developed into a well-recognized methodology for conducting social research. Butterfield et al. (2005) state that CIT is one of the most widely used research methods, recognized as a particularly effective tool for exploration and investigations. This recognition is important, given my intent to use the findings in developing strategies for assisting ICE unit members. The acceptance of this method by the intended audience of this study is bolstered by the fact that it has been used in two recent studies with RCMP officers. One study used CIT to explore factors that hindered or facilitated successful crisis negotiation in a population of police officers (Logan, 2000). The second investigated what helped and hindered RCMP officers in being meaningfully engaged in their work (Morley, 2003). As CIT is designed to assist in identifying themes which are inductively sorted into rich, descriptive categories, both Logan (2000) and Morley (2003) were able to provide the RCMP with tangible information, presented in a pragmatic manner, that could be easily applied to front line policing. These two recent studies demonstrate how the CIT method has been used successfully within the RCMP culture.

Additionally, according to Woolsey (1986), CIT is very compatible with the values, skills and people within counselling psychology as a profession. It is highly flexible, and designed to apply to a wide range of phenomena. CIT can be used for foundational and exploratory work, and for opening and clarifying new domains for further research. Woolsey states that CIT is useful in the early stages of research, because it generates both exploratory information and contributes to theory or model building. Research into coping with ICE work is at a very early stage, and thus suited to this method.

Finally, the approach CIT researchers use when interviewing participants closely resembles operational debriefings in which police officers routinely participate. Soon after an extraordinary incident, involved members are brought together to discuss what happened, what their roles were in the response, what worked well, and what did not. The intent of this debriefing is to educate and identify ways to improve police response to future incidents. Because the CIT interview approach is similar to a process with which they are familiar, participants are likely to be more comfortable engaging with this procedure than other forms of qualitative interviewing.

Situating the Researcher

Since the self of the qualitative researcher is the primary analytical tool in this research design, it is important to include some personal information about my background and motivation.

I am a 39 year old Caucasian female who has worked within the RCMP environment for the past 17 years. During this time I have had the privilege of working directly with individuals touched by crime and trauma from the time of an incident and often days, weeks and even years afterward. In my capacity as an RCMP Victim Services Program Manager, I have been afforded opportunities to work closely with professional helpers, ranging from volunteer and full time victim support workers, police officers, fire fighters, Crown Counsel, coroners, and hospital staff, to social workers and numerous psychotherapists, both in private practice and those employed as therapists through government and non-profit agencies.

Over the years, I have learned a great deal about the human condition. I have been periodically affected by secondary traumatic stress, impacted by the never-ending stories of cruelty and inhumanity, and by witnessing the pain expressed through the voices, eyes and bodies of my clients. I continue to support others impacted by their roles in helping those who hurt. Over the course of my work as a first responder and manager of first responders, I have received training to assess and address vicarious traumatization, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress. I have learned ways to mitigate secondary traumatic stress, and have applied those principles both personally and professionally in the workplace.

In addition to my knowledge and comfort level with this work, and secondary traumatic stress reactions, I have acquired considerable understanding of the inner workings of the RCMP and the Criminal Justice System. Having worked within the organization as a civilian employee, I am quite familiar with the subculture and language spoken by police officers and civilian staff. I have an awareness of and appreciation for, the nature (pressure and limitations) of the jobs of these investigators and support staff within the larger organization as well as within the ICE unit.

Consistent with the paradigm assumptions of the CIT, I recognize that my biases, perceptions and approaches may have had some influence on the outcome of this study. I believe my RCMP experience and familiarity with the culture of the work assisted in developing trust, and resulted in deeper levels of participant disclosure. I was aware that aspects of ICE work were extremely difficult, such as viewing images, coping with the workload, and multiple pressures on an ongoing basis, but attempted to remain open-minded, cautious not to make any assumptions about the impact of the work, as each individual participant would have his or her own experience. I anticipated considerable information obtained from participants would reflect that which was identified in existing literature on secondary traumatic stress.

As this was a new area of research, it was critical to remain aware of my own assumptions and reactions. To counter my biases, I conducted detailed and thorough interviews with each participant, identified all critical incidents and used the participants' own words to identify themes and categories.

With regard to my position towards data collection, I believe that we are all experts regarding our own experiences and have the ability to recognize what we require for optimum functioning. This fits well with current CIT methodology, which has evolved from Flanagan's original procedures to adopt a constructivist paradigm.

Conducting semi-structured interviews and analyzing data based upon participants' experiences (and meaning brought to it by each participant) fits closely with my beliefs and practices. Empowering participants to provide information regarding what they perceive to be critical incidents, exploring the meaning they place on these incidents, and using their words, fits with who I am as a researcher and practitioner. With CIT there is little room for the researcher to place weight or assign value to the information provided. This is all done by the participants.

As my training has been in the area of counselling psychology, the methods used to collect data within CIT fit well for me. The methodology was structured yet flexible, which I believe is optimal when using human participants. The method was also exploratory and respectful, acknowledging participants as the experts concerning their own perceptions.

As the primary analytical tool, I was exposed to information about ICE work that was personally impacting. From my experiences working with victims of crime and trauma, and with police officers exposed to traumatic scenes and heartbreaking stories, I have developed my own protective shield, and have come to know myself very well. Having personally experienced secondary traumatization, I have learned what symptoms to watch for and what strategies help me cope in a healthy way. To mitigate the impact of this research, I had regular conversations with my Supervisor about the nature of the study and its impact on me, accessed support from my spouse who also works in the Criminal Justice System, and kept a journal of my thoughts and responses to the material I was exposed to. Throughout the process I maintained a healthy and balanced lifestyle, ensuring I ate well, exercised and ensured that I obtained enough sleep. By remaining aware and open to the possibility that the study would impact me, I was able to take steps to mitigate the effects and address any impacts early in the investigation, and throughout the study.

Participants

Convenience sampling was used. All full time police officers, public service, and temporary civilian employees working with the “E” Division ICE team were identified as candidates for participation in the study. The target number of participants was 12; although 14 were interviewed just to be sure redundancy was achieved.

Ten females and four males participated in these interviews. Ten participants were regular members of the RCMP or City Police Department, two were public service employees, and two were temporary civilian employees. Regular members are responsible for conducting the criminal investigations, public service employees provide support services to the unit and temporary civilian employees are contracted to view the evidence for major investigations. The average age of the participants was 40, ranging from 25 to 52 years. Participants held an average of 13.5 years of policing experience, with an average of 15 months on the ICE team. Twelve participants indicated they were in a supportive intimate relationship. Ten participants rated their level of coping as 8 out of 10 or higher, with 10 being the highest degree of healthy coping (see Table 1). Participants varied in gender, age, cultural background, length of service and type of experience. Six individuals had children while eight did not.

As this study was exploratory in nature, and the goal was to understand what helps and hinders coping, participants were not required to be experiencing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress or to have undergone any interventions to be included in the study. They were required to be working with the “E” Division ICE team. For the purposes of this study, all participants, regardless of their status as police officer, public service or temporary civilian employee status, will be referred to as ICE team members.

Table 1

Summary of Demographic Information

	Range	Average
Age (years)	25 – 52	39.86
Time on ICE (months)	2 – 36	14.7
Time in policing (months)	2 – 360	160.2
Coping (scale of 1 – 10)	5 – 10	8.2

Recruitment

At an inoculation session for ICE members held on October 11, 2006, information was provided about this study by a Staff Sergeant (S/Sgt) who worked with the "E" Division ICE team. In his overview, the S/Sgt. outlined the general purpose and nature of the study and introduced me. At this meeting, the S/Sgt. advised all present that the RCMP endorsed the study and that anyone wishing to participate were able to do so as part of their regular duty. He informed those present that while participation was encouraged it was not mandatory. I was present to answer questions and provide further details and advised potential participants that they would be required: (a) to give informed consent and to sign a consent form prior to participating in the study, (b) to complete a brief demographic survey, (c) to participate in a digitally audio recorded semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60-75 minutes. Additionally, they were advised that they might be asked to participate in a second meeting to review the incidents extracted and categories developed, requiring an additional 30 – 45 minutes.

Participants were advised that results of the study would be made available in the form of recommendations to the RCMP, to assist in developing a more supportive and healthy work environment. These recommendations would be outlined in such a way as to ensure confidentiality of the participants. All potential participants were informed that:

1. They could withdraw from the study at any point in the process without repercussions.
2. All raw data collected would be completely confidential, including from the RCMP.
3. Participants would be identified solely with a numerical code.
4. The study report would be written by combining information from participants,

with no individually identifiable data being presented.

Potential participants were provided with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix B) which included my contact information, and were asked to contact me directly if interested in participating.

All ICE team members who had expressed interest in participating were contacted and interview times established. All of the participants were interviewed in either a private office or the private boardroom of the "E" Division ICE team.

Data Collection

Prior to conducting individual interviews, interview questions were piloted on three individuals working within specialized units of the Langley RCMP. This was done to increase my skill and comfort level using CIT questioning techniques, and to ensure that the protocols fit with the population being studied. The questions were then refined and used as a guide for the actual data collection interviews (see Appendix C).

All participant interviews were digitally audio-recorded and later transcribed in natural language, to faithfully capture the descriptions of incidents in their entirety.

Interviews

Upon meeting individually with the participants, an opportunity was provided to have any additional questions answered or concerns addressed. Participants were then asked to review and sign the consent form. During this initial conversation, considerable effort was made to establish positive rapport with participants, facilitating a comfort level conducive to full and rich disclosure of incidents. Participants were oriented to the interview using the following script:

> Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am interested in hearing what you have to say about what helps and hinders you in coping with ICE work. I will

> be asking you to think about some of the things that happen over the course of your day that lead you to feel really good about the work and the unit, and things that happen that cause you to feel negative, overwhelmed or just "not happy" with the work on the unit. These might be things people say or do, the types of tasks you are assigned to, things you might do for yourself - anything at all that might impact how you cope.
>
> I will be asking you to describe these to me in detail, and will ask you follow-up questions to be sure I understand exactly what you are saying. I am hoping the information provided by you and all of the participants will help us learn how to better support members in the unit. Results of this study will be made available to all of the participants and to the RCMP and other ICE units.

To begin the process interviewees were asked, "Think back over your time on the ICE team. Can you remember a specific event that you believe either helped or made it harder for you to cope with the work?"

Once the participant responded to this first question and described the incident, I asked what it was about the event that made it helpful (or hindering), and what meaning the incident held for that participant. I asked further questions designed to assist the participant in describing the incident completely, such as "Exactly what happened that you found helpful or hindering?" "How did you know?" "What went on before or after?" "How did it turn out" "Can you tell me more about that?" Throughout the interview I was careful not to ask any leading questions that could have influenced the telling of the incident. Over the course of each interview, I took notes to assist with my analysis.

This process continued until each participant was unable to recall any further helpful or hindering incidents. The final question put to participants was designed to assist them in summing up their thoughts and ideas, and helped give closure to the interview:

"What advice or suggestions would you give to someone new to the unit? And what advice would you give to someone in the process of developing an ICE unit?"

After the interview, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic survey (see Appendix A). Once the questionnaire was completed, participants were thanked for their involvement in the study, and asked if they would be willing to meet again to review the incidents and categories once they were developed. This was to test degree of fit between the categories that were developed from the interviews and participant experiences. Participants were asked if they would like to receive a copy of the results once the study was completed. Those that were interested will receive a copy of the results via e-mail, with a link to the entire thesis.

Transcription

The initial introductory meeting with participants was held on October 11, 2006. Interviews with the 14 participants were conducted between October 17 and October 31, 2006. The digital audio recordings were then downloaded onto the computer, and saved in password protected files labelled by subject numbers to preserve confidentiality. The recordings were then burnt onto DVDs, which were couriered to a transcription firm in Vancouver. Costs for the transcriptions were funded through the RCMP Behavioural Science Group (BSG) budget.

The recorded interviews were transcribed by individuals from All West Reporting, a transcription service used by a number of agencies involved with the Criminal Justice System. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, transcriptionists were selected on the basis that they did not know anyone working with the ICE team. Completed transcripts were e-mailed and password protected. Transcribers were instructed to erase the files from their computer after completing their work. The DVDs were picked up in person by a peace officer and transported to me in a sealed envelope.

All questionnaires, interview recordings and interview transcripts were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet. Access to non-identifying records was restricted to individuals directly involved in the research study. Following completion of the study, the recordings will be destroyed and only the anonymous transcripts (with all identifiers removed) will be retained. These anonymous transcripts were numerically linked to the demographic information, but do not enable anyone to trace the interview back to any specific participant. The anonymous data will be stored indefinitely by the Counselling Psychology Department at Trinity Western University.

Analysis of the Incidents

The transcripts were used in conjunction with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Reviewing the transcripts and audio recordings increased familiarity with the context and information provided by participants. Data analysis was conducted from October 27 – November 18, 2006. Conducting the analysis so near the time of the interviews was extremely beneficial, as it made recall of the participants' tone and level of emotion possible and thus improved my ability to identify the meaning of the incidents, and categorizing them appropriately.

Approaches to Data Analysis

There were three steps to data analysis. Incidents were extracted from the transcripts and placed upon cards, with one incident per card. The cards were then grouped into similar categories and subcategories. The categories and subcategories then underwent a series of reliability and validity checks.

Extraction of Incidents

All participant interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcript of each interview was reviewed carefully, and critical incidents were identified. Audio recordings and interviewer notes were used extensively when working with the data. Once an incident was identified, the actual transcribed words spoken by the participant were duplicated onto 4x6 cards, one incident per card. Information presented on each card fell into the categories adapted from Woolsey's (1986) heading system: (a) the general context (type of event), (b) the specific context (exactly what happened), (c) the source (what really made the event helpful or hindering for coping with ICE work).

Accuracy of Reports

Accuracy was determined by the richness of detail when describing the incident. As stated by Flanagan (1954), the researcher must ensure the incident is recalled in sufficient detail before it is selected for inclusion. Criteria for inclusion for this study required general information about the circumstance, the specific incident – what was said, done or experienced, and recall of the meaning of the incident for the participant. If the initial description of an incident was lacking in detail, follow-up questions were asked during the interview to elicit sufficient detail.

Category Formation

After the incidents were carded, they were analyzed through a process of inductive reasoning. Specifically, categories were formed by clustering incidents that were thematically similar in nature. When forming clusters, incidents themselves were considered, along with their underlying meaning. Once the cards were sorted, self-explanatory category titles and descriptions were developed. Sub-categories were formed within particular categories to identify specific constructs. Cards were sorted until all of the categories and subcategories clearly reflected the entirety of the data.

Reliability and Validation Procedures

Following the recommendations of Butterfield et al. (2005), nine credibility and trustworthiness checks were conducted.

1. Independent Extraction of Critical Incidents: To increase the credibility of the incident extraction process, two individuals trained in the CIT methodology were asked to independently extract 25% of critical incidents from the transcripts. The agreement rate between their extraction and the original analysis was calculated, yielding a high level of agreement (91% and 88%).
2. Participant Cross Checking (interpretive validity): To improve credibility and acknowledge participants as the experts of their own experiences, six randomly selected participants were asked to examine the results and confirm that the categories developed fit with their experience. They were also asked if there was anything they wanted to add, delete or change in any of the categories. All of the participants indicated they felt the data fit strongly with their experience or the experience of the team. A number of them revealed that they were quite moved to see their experience so completely and concisely laid out in black and white. A few participants provided feedback on some of the categories, mainly giving additional examples that supported the category. Several of the participants specifically requested the need for technical support to be highlighted more strongly, as they felt this theme was not captured in the results as strongly as they would like. Participant feedback was incorporated into the final results, including adding a separate subcategory, entitled Lack of

Technical Support, within the hindering category of Lack of Resources.

3. As a further reliability check, two independent judges trained in the CIT methodology placed 25% of randomly chosen critical incidents into the tentatively formed categories. There was a 97% agreement rate with the original categorization, which is further suggestive of sound categories.
4. The point of exhaustiveness (i.e., when new categories stopped emerging from the data) occurred after 12 participant interviews. To confirm that exhaustiveness had been reached, two additional interviews were conducted. No new categories emerged in these interviews.
5. To enhance category credibility, tentative categories that emerged from the data were submitted to Dr. Patrice Keats and Dr. Jeff Morley, both experts in the area of secondary traumatic stress. In addition to their knowledge and experience in the area, Dr. Keats has a particular expertise in vicarious witnessing, and Dr. Morley is a Staff Sergeant with the RCMP. Both auditors concluded that the categories fit with the literature in the field. Dr. Keats made several suggestions for tightening up the wording of category descriptions to more accurately reflect the content. These were incorporated into the final description of the findings.
6. To ensure the categories were valid, the participation rate was calculated by dividing the number of participants who cited specific incidents with the total number of participants. A participation rate of 25% (four participants) was used when developing categories and subcategories. Of note, although the 25% criterion was used, during participant cross checking, all team members indicated they found that the categories and subcategories strongly reflected

their experience.

7. Theoretical validity: Results were examined in light of the existing relevant scholarly literature for support and relevance. Feedback was also obtained from Drs Keats and Morley, experts in the field. The results fit very soundly with existing literature. Aspects related to viewing and coping with ICE work offered new contributions to the field.
8. Descriptive validity: Accuracy of the account was achieved by copying the actual words of participants in their entirety onto cards. Participant cross-checking also assisted with ensuring accuracy.
9. Interview fidelity was achieved by having the thesis supervisor, who is familiar with CIT method; review every fourth interview to ensure compliance with the methodology.

These extensive credibility and trustworthiness checks ensured that the final set of results, presented in the following chapter, is a valid representation of the experience of coping with ICE work.

Upon the successful defence of this thesis, participants were contacted to obtain their feedback and preference regarding naming their team in this study. All participants indicated they were comfortable having the “E” Division ICE team named in this study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

From the 14 interviews, a total of 795 incidents were identified. Of the 795 incidents, 446 were identified by the participants as helpful to coping with Internet Child Exploitation work, and 349 were identified as hindering to coping with Internet Child Exploitation work. The 795 incidents were sorted into 24 categories: 12 that were helpful, and 12 that were hindering. The categories were labelled in such a way as to capture the essence of information contained in each of the categories. These categories will be discussed in detail throughout the rest of this chapter.

Categories that Describe What Helps Coping with ICE Work

The 12 categories identified by participants as helpful to coping with Integrated Child Exploitation work contained 40 subcategories. The categories are described in order of decreasing frequency of incidents. Describing them in this order is not meant to indicate importance of certain categories and incidents. It is simply meant to indicate a high level of commonality occurring within the most frequent categories.

The following table is a summary of the categories and participant participation in each of the categories. The table contains the category name, incident, and participant frequencies. These frequencies are the number of incidents and participants associated with each category. The table frequencies are also provided as percentages (see Table 2).

Table 2

Incidents that Help Coping with ICE Work

Category of incident	Number of incidents (percentage of total)	Number of participants (percentage of total)
1. Viewing strategies	66 (15%)	14 (100%)
2. Psychological support	66 (15%)	13 (93%)
3. Personal strategies	62 (14%)	13 (93%)
4. Peer Support	54 (12%)	14 (100%)
5. Meaningfulness/purpose	41 (9%)	10 (71%)
6. Social support	34 (8%)	12 (86%)
7. Personal characteristics	24 (5%)	10 (71%)
8. Cognitive strategies	23 (5%)	10 (71%)
9. Organizational support	21 (5%)	8 (57%)
10. Supervision	20 (4%)	11 (79%)
11. Humour	18 (4%)	11 (79%)
12. Candidate selection	18 (4%)	13 (93%)

Category 1: Viewing Strategies (66 incidents, 14 participants)

This category contains incidents that describe strategies employed both prior to and during the viewing process. As this was a large category, it has been divided into six subcategories to capture the depth and provide clarity. The six subcategories are: (a) Gradual Introduction of Images to New Members, (b) Mental Preparation Prior to Viewing, (c) Dissociation/ Compartmentalization, (d) Monitoring Self / Taking Breaks (in the moment), (e) Focusing on Evidence/ Remaining Analytical, and (f) Determining When, Where, and How to View.

Category 1a: Gradual introduction of new members to viewing. Incidents in this category relate to helpful guidance and coaching provided to new members around viewing child exploitation material. Participants identified the importance of gradually exposing new members to viewing, starting with the least graphic images and working up to the more difficult images. This type of introduction provides the opportunity for new members to become exposed on a gradual basis, and helps them to feel more prepared. This preparation was seen as being helpful to coping with the viewing process. An example is provided below:

> He had a file where the fellow was downloading child pornography but it wasn’t that bad, and he got to start with that file, and he was telling me how he was really thankful about that because later on he had to work on a file where the images were really bad and he was happy that he had been exposed to images that weren’t as bad before. He was able to build up to that worse situation, and he found that very helpful.

Participants contributing to this category also stressed the importance of making sure members new to the unit are prepared for the reactions they may experience while viewing, and ensuring they are aware those reactions are normal. One participant noted, “The biggest thing is letting them know they are going to feel anger, frustration, revulsion, and that is normal.”

In addition to preparing new members for their reactions, participants also identified the importance for new members to have a plan to deal with their responses when they are affected, and to know that it is acceptable to show their emotions. According to one of the participants:

> If it’s bothering you, tell somebody. You’re not going to get fired; you’re not going to get tossed out because you are being human. We have this preconceived notion that when we have the badge on, we are super heroes, can see, can do anything and it doesn’t bother us. The hardest thing to let these guys know is that we are human and we can show emotion.

Category 1b: Mental preparation prior to viewing. Preparation is not only applicable to new members. Several of the participants identified being mentally prepared as a key strategy that helps to cope with the work. Having awareness that what they will be viewing may be unsettling allows them to enter into the right frame of mind for viewing. As the images can be graphic and disturbing, an appropriate frame of mind would include being prepared to focus on being analytical and objective. One participant described this need to be prepared before beginning the viewing process, suggesting that without preparation, the viewing becomes far more difficult.

> I’m going to see the worse stuff I have seen in years. I’m getting that mentality, where you are prepared to deal with it. Like to me, you just don’t go from dealing with a phone call where someone in your family has

> passed away, and then all of a sudden, in the next five minutes you are viewing. That would not be healthy.

Category 1c: Dissociation/compartmentalization. Many of the participants described the ability to dissociate or compartmentalize their feelings during the actual viewing process, to be helpful in coping with the work. Some of the methods they found to be successful in accomplishing this included pretending that what they were seeing was not real, deliberately containing the emotions, and making themselves not think about their work.

> And she was – it's the sound, and that is when you have to cut yourself away again. It was a four year old and she was crying and whimpering. And begging and telling Daddy, "No." And obviously Daddy wasn't – just continuing. And then just hearing those sounds again, it was like you just got to get away. You've got to concentrate and think of something else. Like you physically have to take yourself and mentally make yourself not think about it.

Other participants made reference to "putting walls up" and "keeping it in a separate compartment in my soul." Another participant described being aware of when feelings were coming to the surface and then making a deliberate choice to step back and shut the emotional part of themselves down. One participant described it this way: "You take a step back, put the feelings in a different corner, and as somebody put it 'put it in a box, close the lid,' and then you look at it in a very clinical manner."

This ability to dissociate or compartmentalize seemed to be a helpful way of coping with viewing graphic images employed by many of the participants. By using this approach, participants were often able to shield themselves from the emotional impact of the images and remain functional in their roles.

Category 1d: Monitoring self/ taking breaks (in the moment). Several of the participants described the importance of being self aware and knowing when to physically step away from the work. They highlighted the importance of monitoring their reactions and responses and using that awareness as a tool to ensure they continued to remain objective. According to one participant:

> Whenever you start peaking, what you feel is your level of peaking; you just step away from the situation. Whether it is going across the street to grab a cup of coffee or making tea here at the office, or just going to the washroom.

Some participants described having developed a ‘third sense’ that helped them to self-monitor; others described noting changes in behaviour as a cue to take a break.

> I think you just reach the point where you mentally realize, “Okay, I’m treading water here.” You start to realize you are jumping from one task to another. You’re trying to do an e-mail, but then you – “Oh, maybe I should check my voice mails. Oh I wonder if I should read through this thing I’ve got here,” and then you are back to the e-mail. And it’s like “Where am I going right now?” I need to take a break, focus.

Taking a break was described not only as necessary in the moment, but also as necessary for the long term health of members in the unit. According to a participant, stepping away was a helpful way to cope with one overwhelming situation.

> There was one point I became actually physically ill from stuff I found under this guy’s bed, and actually had to take – I was out dry-heaving in the backyard. Leave the situation then come back in when you are ready,

> in a different mind-set. There is so much evidence to deal with you can't afford to go by your emotions, you have to get rid of them. So in that case, stepping away, getting out of that immediate environment that was making me ill, I had to gain control again.

Category 1e: Focusing on evidence/ remaining analytical. Several of the participants described the importance of focusing on the evidence, and remaining analytical while viewing, to be a helpful coping strategy. Having a specific viewing strategy was described as being helpful as it allowed participants to remain detached.

> You have a template that you are following, you have your set criteria in front of you, and that is what you are looking at. In this instance you have a specific job. By having the structure and focusing on the process and the template, it helps you not take it personally. You become more clinical.

The difference between looking at images emotionally versus clinically was described succinctly by one participant:

> You have to look at it and analyze it. You have to look at it and say, okay, is it child pornography, yes or no. Okay, what stage is it in child pornography? So that's what I mean analytically as opposed to looking at it and going "Fuck, there's that kid again," or "Oh geez." "Oh, I can't look at this." Those are the differences.

Another useful strategy described by several of the participants was to make a point of not identifying personally with the victim, not to see any resemblances to their children or friend's daughter or neighbours' child. One participant said "I think the biggest thing is to take your focus away from the face of the person, the victim."

Category 1f: Determining when, where, and how to view. Several participants identified that being deliberate about when, where and how to view the work-related material was another helpful way to cope with viewing. Some participants commented on the importance of having a professional and private environment in which to view, free from interruptions. Several participants described that being in the right frame of mind for viewing was very helpful. Although not always possible, participants described that there were better times to view than others. For women, viewing during certain times in their menstrual cycle made it more difficult to remain objective. Being tired or emotional prior to viewing also made it more difficult to remain analytical and detached.

> It helps to get the viewing done as soon as it is requested, as opposed to putting it off and putting it off because then you are under the gun to get it done, and then you have a huge quantity to do in a short period of time. On some days if you are feeling okay, you got lots of sleep the night before; you can do big chunks and get it over with. Other days you go – today is not the day to be viewing that stuff for a lot of reasons, issues at home, or just tired so I can't focus.

Viewing in the morning was described by some of the participants as helpful as most found they were much fresher in the morning. In addition, if the viewing was limited to morning only, it allowed more time for the images to leave the mind prior to returning home to their families.

> If we do need to view anything, we try and do it first thing in the morning – try to be done by nine or ten in the morning, so that you'll have the rest of the day to distance yourself and do other stuff, and so by the time you go home to your family, those images are not fresh in your mind.

Other participants identified that viewing with a partner was very helpful as it was then possible to help each other remain in a more analytical frame of mind. It also allowed the team to use humour as a coping mechanism when they were paired with another.

> We were making each other laugh so then you can kind of dissociate yourselves from the images a bit because you start talking about other things. You can be a bit more scientific about it. You can be like – okay, look at this couch or look at this, so you get away from identifying with the victim a little bit, when someone else is there.

The incidents described in the Viewing Strategies category refer to the things participants found helped them to cope with viewing the images of child sexual abuse. We now turn to the next category to explore what types of things helped participants, in the area of Psychological Support.

Category 2: Psychological support (66 incidents, 13 participants)

Incidents in this category relate to the aspects of psychological support that helped participants cope with ICE work. Areas highlighted include the beneficial impact of psychological support, the value of, and requirements for, future psychological interventions. As this was a large category, incidents were divided into four subcategories. They are: (a) Inoculation Session, (b) Mandatory Annual Psychological Assessment, (c) Access to Private Psychologists, and (d) Suggested Future Interventions.

Category 2a: Inoculation session. Incidents in this category relate to the helpful aspects provided by the inoculation session that ICE members had recently experienced. An inoculation session was held for the first time for the ICE team on October 16, 2006. It was off site and facilitated by two Registered Psychologists. At the start of the inoculation session individuals were shown still pictures and videos without sound of child sexual abuse. Participants were then guided through a standard debriefing session to help facilitate discussion on thoughts, feelings, and reactions experienced when looking at the images. A psycho-educational component on symptoms and coping concluded the session.

Incidents in this category included recognizing the value of the intervention, the benefits of seeing the impact of the work on team mates, the benefits of sharing and receiving information on symptoms and reactions, and the benefits of having feelings normalized. According to one participant:

> Seeing the human side was helpful, because with police work in general, you’re sort of expected to just have that image that nothing affects you and just tough it out, its easy to do. I built that wall and nothing bothered me. I don’t know if that was good, but I think seeing the human reaction reminds you that this is a horrible crime and it really does affect people.

For many of the participants, having the opportunity to come together as a group and talk openly about the work and their response to the images they see was very beneficial.

> The knowledge that other people have trouble with it, the commonality that we are all – it’s a difficult thing, we do have trouble with it, and we will, as a result of that. If you recognize something it is easier to deal with.

Another helpful aspect of the inoculation session was the opportunity each participant had to release feelings that had been building up, and to receive reassurance that those feelings were normal.

> I think the biggest thing for the team is reassurance to everybody that what we are doing is important and that we’re going to be upset with the

> pictures - and that's okay.

One participant also commented that attending the inoculation session was beneficial for individuals uncomfortable with seeking professional help, as they received some psychological assistance without being singled out.

> You are there voluntarily, but you are there as a group so it's a little more – not like you've gone and sought someone out for a problem. So you are there as part of your job, we view this, no big deal. But then you kind of get this expertise, so it's not like you've phoned the psychologist, gone downtown, made an appointment and sat in and don't know where the results are going to go. I think it's good for that reason.

Several of the participants found the inoculation session to be extremely beneficial on a number of levels, and expressed a desire to see them offered on a regular basis for all team members. A number of participants indicated they would like to see these sessions repeated within their own groups every six months.

Category 2b: Mandatory annual psychological assessment. Incidents in this category involve recognizing the importance of annual assessments as a safety net, to normalize reactions, and as opportunity for introspection.

Many of the participants identified psychological assessments as being a good idea, and felt that it was important to attend these sessions. Several felt that the fact that assessments were mandatory highlighted the seriousness of the work ICE members do. One participant described it this way:

> We get a psychological assessment done once a year. So just by setting that up and making it a mandatory thing that shows us that what we are doing is pretty serious. And by you saying "yes, I'm handling it," it isn't

> enough. They want someone to properly assess you to make sure you are handling the job okay and that it's not detrimental to your health or anything like that.

Several participants referred to the mandatory assessment as a "safety net." "It's not like I'm having to sit down with my supervisor and say, 'I'm having problems with this.' It's someone totally separate - and knowing that, you have that sort of safety almost in a sense."

It was interesting to note that despite the high level of importance placed upon annual assessments by several of the participants, some of them were themselves over-due or had never been to their annual assessments, despite having been on the unit for over one year.

Being able to connect and develop a relationship with the Psychologist was also identified as helpful. Some of the participants emphasized the importance of having a relationship with the psychologist prior to the assessment, and expressed hope that the same psychologist would be around the next time they needed an assessment. "I am hoping he'll still be around next year, so that there can be some sort of relationship there."

Category 2c: Access to private psychologists. Incidents in this category relate to the frequency of contact and benefits derived from accessing psychological assistance. Several of the participants discussed the importance of having psychologists available who have knowledge of the work they do and an understanding of the range of symptoms and reactions they may experience.

> Definitely having psychologists out there that know what we're going through. I have utilized that. And that's been a plus, because rather than

> taking it home, you know, something I needed to work out, outside of the office, then you have a safe environment where someone totally understands, and you can share it confidentially.

Some of the participants indicated it would be helpful to have the psychologists themselves inoculated in order to increase their understanding of the work.

> I think it’s the psychologists who work with us who should be inoculated with those images. So they understand that this is what we see, and so they have a better understanding of the kinds of feelings that we might have so they are better equipped to help us.

A few of the participants relayed that having a psychologist to go to on a regular basis has become one of their coping mechanisms. “I think it is just another tool in the tool box of being able to debrief stuff you hang on to, that may be sliding into your personal life every now and then.” And from another, “Seeing a counsellor gives me the avenue to have a release so I don’t take it home, and I don’t take it out on my coworkers and I don’t keep it inside."

Overall, this was a very strong subcategory, involving incidents from 11 of the 14 participants. Access to, and familiarity with, a psychologist was viewed as a healthy and positive way to cope with ICE work. Several of the participants in this category felt it was important to have the psychologists exposed to the work and its impact in some way so that they had greater understanding. Participants believed psychologists would then be able to have more empathy and understanding toward them. “I want to hear that they know what everyone else is thinking, that I’m not completely crazy when I go in there and that they’ve seen it.”

Category 2d: Suggested future interventions. Participants in this category identified future interventions that they believed would help unit members cope with ICE work. These included psycho-educational sessions on topics such as nutrition, symptoms, reactions, and coping strategies for unit members. Separate family sessions were thought to be a good idea as well.

Consideration should be given to the match between file assignments and individual team members. According to some participants, it is important for supervisors to have an awareness of the personal circumstances of unit members, and to use that knowledge when making decisions about assigning files.

> If you've got a certain officer that has two young girls, and you know that you have an investigation where the victims are primarily three to five year olds and it's the absolute worse stuff that you are going to be viewing, maybe that's not the best officer that should be seeing it.

One participant believed it was important for supervisors to be aware of the time of year and how that also might impact individuals on the unit. Parents may be more vulnerable around Christmas time, "especially if they are in the process of viewing 500,000 images." Participants also commented on the need to develop and enforce strict viewing limits. According to one participant

> We need to have someone to say "No, no matter what, you are getting out at 12 o'clock, no matter what." Having it a policy. You actually can't. Or maybe not 12 o'clock, maybe five hour stints, which is a lot. A policy that says you can't do it for more than five hours.

Having a system in place where duties could be rotated to allow individuals to have a break from all of the viewing and have a chance to focus on all of the paperwork that has to be done for these investigations was recommended by another participant to help the team cope with the work.

> Rotate the exhibits around. One person be exhibits once, and you view those and you go on and you write a warrant and the next person will be your exhibits, and just to give them something else to do other than just the viewing.

One participant suggested management consider implementing a time limit for being on the unit to help individuals cope with the work. While this was not a recurring issue discussed during the participant interviews, pros and cons to setting limits were discussed with participants during the participant checks. Strong opinions were expressed for both points of views during these conversations.

Category 3: Personal strategies (62 incidents, 13 participants)

Personal strategies was another relatively large category. As a result, it was divided into five subcategories that better reflect all of the salient information and allow a comprehensive explanation of all of the major themes. The five subcategories that emerged from participants' discussions about personal strategies were: (a) Hobbies that Distract the Mind or Offer a Sense of Escape, (b) Exercise, (c) Grounding Activities, (d) Putting a Limit on Viewing (each day), and (e) Boundary Setting.

Category 3a: Hobbies that distract the mind or offer a sense of escape. This category involves incidents that offer distraction, keep the mind busy, and allow for a sense of escape. Several of the participants provided a number of examples of activities they engage in outside of work that help them cope with ICE work. Many of the activities involved some form of distraction, for example, several of the participants found that reading pleasure books was an effective avenue for escape – a way to keep the mind off the job. "I love reading books, just novels, easy-going stuff, that's an escape for me." In particular, some participants indicated that they found reading before bed was a useful way to keep their mind focused and to help them fall asleep.

A few of the participants found that music offered that same distraction. As one participant explained:

> I put my favourite CDs in, drive to work listening to music that I want, drive home from work after a hard day, to music I wanted. That is one of the priorities, when I get in the car, is get some music I want in there. I just think it relaxes me, takes my mind off things.

Several participants mentioned that engaging in things unrelated to work was incredibly important to them. Helpful distracting hobbies included camping, hiking, attending hockey or baseball games, getting out of town and going for drives. Travel was also highlighted as an effective way to distract the mind, for several participants when they were away, they did not have to worry or think about work.

Some of the participants described the actual act of getting out and being with others helped to remind them they were human.

> We'll go out and do stuff, or we'll get out of town and just do an activity, whether it's camping or hiking or going to a hockey game, or just something completely unrelated. That helps because of course it reminds you that you are human, and so is everybody else and not everybody is bad.

Category 3b: Exercise. Most of the participants indicated they routinely used physical exercise to cope with stress, relieve tension and to gain perspective. One of the participants discussed how exercise was used as a way to cope with stress and anger. "I'm a very physical person so I find doing physical things really helps me cope with stress and any anger or anything that I feel. It really works well for me."

Another participant described intense workouts as a helpful way to release frustration and other feelings.

> I was basically mad for a month because of the stuff this guy was doing. And what I found for that month, especially when you go work out, it's a much more intense workout. So you feel fatigued at the end of it, and that's a way of just releasing that frustration that was pent-up feelings.

Several participants described using intense workouts in this manner. One participant described consciously using exercise to release anger still within her. She would think about upsetting things to give her that rush of adrenalin and then consciously run the anger (adrenaline) off.

Many of the participants contributing to this category said they slept better, had more energy and a general sense of wellbeing when they were exercising regularly.

> If I don't work out every couple of days at least, my whole body just feels kind of physically depressed. It's like after you have gone for a run, you feel your blood has gone through your body, and then it is time to relax. It is like the endorphins come out in your body saying "good for you" – you just get that physical feeling of wellness and it makes you mentally feel that wellness as well.

From another: "Exercise is definitely helping - running. Even though I hate it, I always feel better after."

In addition to offering an outlet for stress, anger, and frustration, and providing a feeling of wellness, some participants found that exercise was a helpful way to take a break from all that is going on. "When you're running, you're concentrating on other things. You’re concentrating on pace, breathing, everything else. So that you can actually shut the other stuff off. And so it’s almost like a rest period from it. It’s a time out.”

Category 3c: Grounding activities. Incidents in this category relate to activities that offer comfort, solace, reconnection, ritual, and health benefits. Participants discussed the importance of connection through volunteering, spending time with children, and having fun. Several of the parents found that taking time to be with their children was incredibly helpful. One explained

> Having the children, having a life outside of the office helps because it gives you that reality check that you’re just a hand in the bucket here and if I left, then I would leave and you know my children and my husband are the most important thing. So it does help as well. It helps keep you focused on what is the most important thing.

On a similar note, another participant reported, “volunteering at the school makes me feel good because I am connecting with my child.” Another also found “doing things with the kids, taking them skating, taking them walking with the dogs” to be very grounding.

Some of the participants discussed their belief in God or a higher power, and the meaning and influence spirituality has on their lives. Specifically, having a belief in something larger was seen to be an important way to maintain perspective. “Church is a big thing. It keeps me grounded.”

Other participants talked about start-of-the-day rituals or end-of-the-day rituals as helpful ways to stay grounded.

> I always take my coffee breaks. We have a sort of ritual where once everyone is in we all go for coffee. That’s very ritualistic. We always do

> that and we joke. We don't really talk about files or anything like that.

One participant described having time alone as extremely beneficial – time away from family, friends and work. Participants also described having time for hobbies or just thinking to be very beneficial and often very grounding.

Category 3d: Putting daily limits on viewing. Incidents in this category relate to participants making deliberate decisions during their workday to limit the amount of viewing they are doing in order to help them cope. As described by one participant:

> Just knowing your own limitations and breaking up, having to view stuff versus the investigation, the phone calls, the paper work, like that file I mentioned earlier with 300,000 images. You can't do all that in one day, so I would try and limit myself to a couple of hours, or a couple of file folders or whatever.

Category 3e: Boundary setting. Participants contributing to this category stressed the importance of setting boundaries around ICE work in the bigger picture in order not to burn out. Incidents in this category included such things as knowing when unit members had enough of ICE work, and when it was time to leave the unit and move to another area of policing. Re-evaluating yourself in the job as life circumstances change can be very helpful. One participant described it this way:

> Be true to yourself. If you've had enough, you've had enough. Move to [a different team], move – just move. I mean the family dynamics could change. You could get children into your family, or the dynamics change and it affects you more than what you thought it would.

Participants working on the ICE team demonstrate incredible commitment and dedication to their work. Having the ability to recognize when they are being affected negatively and being able to give themselves permission to leave the unit when it is time, is very important for the health and wellbeing of individuals getting in to this work.

> The secret is, you have to know when enough is enough. And you have to know yourself well enough that you can save yourself, because by the time it comes for someone else to save you, it's going to be a bit late.

Category 4: Peer Support (54 incidents, 14 participants)

Participants discussed interactions with their peers and the positive impact team members have on the experience of individuals within the unit. This category was divided into three subcategories: (a) Team, (b) Emotional Connectedness with Team Mates (caring for your fellow worker), and (c) Working with Like-Minded Colleagues.

Category 4a: Team. The benefits of being part of this team included working together as equals, helping each other, brainstorming and learning from each other. These were described by participants as being very helpful in coping with ICE work. Several of the participants described the inclusive nature of the ICE team.

> Being part of the team is very important. Where all members involved in the case or project are asked for their input, are listened to, are part of the decision making process. Those are all very important.

Several of the participants commented on the helpful nature of their peers. Specifically, that co-workers will drop everything to help others out, that there are no ranks in the unit, and that everyone seems to gain comfort from seeking others out for guidance and assistance. One participant described her experience of the team in the following way:

> They are the best bunch of people I've ever worked with and one of the

> things that I really like about them is how much we all are willing to help each other and support each other in the work that we do. There's no bitching, moaning, groaning and complaining and competing and holding fast to your work and not helping. Everybody is extremely helpful. It's a real team-like approach.

As the ICE team is relatively new, there is a steep learning curve for most of the newer members. Many of the individuals come in with expertise in different areas. Brainstorming and sharing information is key to their success:

> For the decision making, we'll hash things out. We'll have a break and then we will hash out decisions on investigational strategies and stuff, which is very helpful to everybody. And if you don't have as much experience as some of the other ICE members, it prevents errors. So that's huge.

"High calibre" was the term often used by participants to describe their colleagues. Having such quality team members provided the participants with a sense of confidence and a feeling of peace knowing complex investigations would be investigated properly.

> It gives me peace of mind that when we're doing something that I have experts and individuals that are capable and willing to do not only the work, but to the best of their ability and do it well.

Category 4b: Emotional connectedness with team mates (caring for your fellow worker). This category involved 11 of the 14 participants. Strikingly apparent from the words chosen by all of the participants in this category was the deep sense of concern and high level of connectedness individual team members held for each other. This was demonstrated by the comfort they expressed in seeking out their peers when they needed to talk about their feelings and reactions, and their ability to share on a personal level with each other. The levels of honesty, respect and trust they had for each other were described as significant factors in the participants' relationships with others. Participants also described consciously watching out for each other and approaching colleagues if they appeared to be having difficulties. A powerful feeling of belonging to a close and supportive family was experienced by many of the participants.

Given the nature of the work, and the types of images they see, ICE members are severely restricted in who they can talk to about their work. According to participants, talking, sharing, and accessing the support of colleagues is an extremely important way to cope with ICE work.

> I'll be viewing something and I go, "Oh shit" or "Fuck." And somebody will hear me swear and come around and say "Oh, what's going on?" type of thing, a big affirmation that this is pretty bad. Or I will get up and go for a walk, and go over and talk to somebody and just shake my head and – you know, maybe describe a little bit of what I am seeing. Being able to vent. Sympathetically, understandingly, or agree.

The following serves as an example of many of the incidents offered by the participants describing the awareness team members have of themselves and each other during the course of the day on the ICE team.

> People here are very helpful. Everybody is in the same line of work. We're all doing the same stuff. I think all of us have done in the past, where we are all aware of who's doing what and how it might be affecting them, or how long they've been doing it. There have been lots of times

> where I have gone to others or they have come to me and said, “Hey, let’s go for coffee,” or “Hey, we need a break, can you come help me with this?” So just to break up the day, or break up whatever you’re trying to work on. The people in the office are really good for that.

This awareness of others and the knowledge that team members are looking out for one another offers a sense of comfort.

> You’re very grateful, because they are aware of what you are going through, and that you might be – not struggling, but there is a concern there for your well-being and whatnot. That is good to know, that there are people watching out for you, or keeping an eye out, and willing to put aside what they are doing and offer to help you.

According to some of the participants, an incredibly strong bond has developed among unit members, far stronger than any other bond they have had in teams on other units they have been on. This bond is built with trust, respect, by sharing intense emotional experiences, and sharing an understanding of the work - understanding impossible to have unless you are personally involved in it. According to one of the participants:

> People – it’s an intimacy. People are willing to tell you that. It’s not like the person you would pass on the street – “How are you today?” “Oh fine.” What does that tell you? Nothing. But when you have people saying “Gee, I went through the same thing you did,” or “Gee, when I view those videos of those kids, I feel like I am going to puke,” and stuff like that. People, the closeness that way, that you can relate to these people. There is just such an openness that way – and I think it’s so important that you can

> vent to people and say, "My God, if I see one more bloody photo like this today, I'm just going to scream." And they understand it.

Category 4c: Working with like-minded colleagues. In addition to the feelings of emotional connectedness that had developed, peer support stood out as particularly helpful to participants. Participants expressed that having a belief that unit members are of like mind, possess a shared dedication to the work, have the same work ethic, and are driven because of the subject matter also seemed to strengthen the team and help participants cope with ICE work.

> I think first of all what helps is having good colleagues, good people that you work with that are passionate about the job and feel motivated to do it for similar kinds of goals. It's a unique crime in that there's not a lot of difference of opinion on the moral level of it. It's all pretty hated. So it's easy to get motivated to do the work.

Another participant expressed the importance of the group all working together for one purpose:

> So as much as we can have different personalities, the fundamental goal is the protection of these children. That simple. So they are all geared to saving and heading in that direction with these files. So if you have something that has to be done, they will get it done because they understand clearly that it's going to impact those investigations or a child specifically, especially if it's going to be something that's ongoing or still happening – it's a lot of abuse.

Category 5: Meaningfulness/purpose (41 incidents, 10 participants)

Participants in this category described factors that help the individual to remain passionate, motivated and purposeful about the work. This category has been divided into two subcategories: (a) Nature of the Work/ Making a Difference, and (b) Motivation.

Category 5a: Nature of the work/ making a difference. A substantial number of the participants (9 out of 14) described a profound belief in the importance of the work and the feeling that they were making a difference in the world. As one participant described, “You might not feel good about what you are seeing, but you feel good about what you are doing. You feel good about what you are trying to do. You know that you are doing something important.” In relation to making a difference, another participant said, “I think just the satisfaction that you know it’s the worst of policing, because you look at your victims like that, and it’s the best of policing in the fact that you feel like you’re making a difference.” Similarly another reported, “I finally feel like I’m doing something meaningful. I’m really blessed to have that feeling finally.”

Participants also discussed the nature of the work and the influence it has on keeping them motivated.

> The nature of the work – it’s just simply not the same in people’s minds as going to yet another stolen car report incident. So the subject matter itself, strikes more to the emotions of people to begin with. And you know you really want to help victims and you really want to catch the bad guys when it comes to this type of work.

The subject matter, viewing the images, working on a unit that has the opportunity to save child victims, provided team members with a deeper sense of meaning and a stronger commitment to the work. This is a significant factor in helping them continue to return to the job, despite its difficult nature.

Category 5b: Motivation. Participants described things that inspire and motivate them to continue to do their best in the work. These included their worldview, feeling respected and appreciated by others, having a sense of accomplishment, feeling pride in seeing the evolution of the unit, and feeling driven to do the work.

One participant described the sense of accomplishment that resulted when an investigation proceeded past the charge approval stage. The decision to lay a charge is made by Crown Counsel, after reviewing the complete investigation package and being satisfied the burden of proof can be met in a court of law: "If we do get to the point of laying charges, having the person convicted, it's certainly good for the victim very often, and certainly very good for me, or other investigators as police."

Feeling respected and valued by others was another way that participants felt motivated.

> And very significantly, I found for me that for self worth, was that my experience was listened to and thought about and wasn't useless, and the practicality of what I am doing, the skill set that I have developed over all these years, was being put to a good use, a beneficial use. And again, it comes down to feeling worthwhile.

Similarly, having a belief in the work that is being done by the unit contributes to personal meaning helps many of the team members cope with ICE work. Some of the participants also discussed a belief that their efforts will make an impact on the prosecution of a case.

According to participants, judiciary refuse to look at the images of child sexual abuse to prevent themselves from becoming traumatized or overly prejudiced. As a result, some of the participants indicated they described the images in their reports as thoroughly and accurately as possible to present the courts with an exact picture of the crime. Despite the enormous workload pressure, one participant described this motivation:

> I can do it because the guys that you are trying to put in jail, or arrest, are the worst guys. You're trying to put them in jail, you are trying to punish them, you are trying to find victims, you are trying to write up the stuff that they've viewed in the most poignant way possible so that a judge who will refuse to view the images might read it and say "Wow, this is really bad. I don't want to see them because I'll be traumatized, but this writing has traumatized me enough." Because sometimes all you have is how you write it.

Category 6: Social Support (34 incidents, 12 participants)

The role that friends, family and spouses play in helping participants cope is described. Participants contributing to this category identified social connection and activity with others as very beneficial in helping them to cope with the work. Three subcategories of social support emerged: (a) Support from Spouse, (b) Spouse Works in the Criminal Justice Field, and (c) Being with Friends or Family.

Category 6a: Support from spouse. Participants described that having a supportive spouse provided the opportunity to have someone to talk to, to receive support from, and to engage in activities with. One participant described her spouse as understanding and supportive of her work: "My husband is very understanding. He loves what I do so he is very supportive." Another participant described her spouse as being instrumental in keeping her grounded in reality: "When I read something that really disturbs me. He can remind me that it's work and that by the time it gets to me you're helping someone and you know, the whole spiel."

Many of the participants reported that it was very helpful having a spouse to spend time with, and to do things with. “We stay home a lot together, but we’re never off doing our own thing in two separate rooms so that’s good. We spend a lot of time together which brings me back to reality, and what life is about.” Others referred to having stability at home as being instrumental to their sense of well-being. “Well, just the stability at home. That my wife supports me coming and doing this.”

Several participants also described talking with their spouses as very helpful. One participant stated, “I talk to my spouse about it. Not what I am seeing, because I don’t think that’s fair, but about my experience.” Another participant described “I guess talking. Talking about anything does help. I’ll talk to my spouse in relation to the generalities of the investigation and why it’s bothering me more than anything.”

Having a significant other to spend time with, to share feelings and experiences with, and to do things with, offered participants’ opportunities to release emotion, gain perspective and benefit from a sense of companionship. Stable, supportive relationships with spouses were seen as helpful to coping with ICE work.

Category 6b: Spouse works in the criminal justice field. Individual participants with spouses involved in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) identified that fact as being particularly helpful in coping with ICE work. Spouses involved in the CJS had an understanding of the system and its process, which made them easier to talk to. In particular, it was felt by participants contributing to this category that these spouses were better able to understand and offer informed perspectives. “My partner at home is involved in the system as well, and she’s very involved in the criminal justice process, so she understands it.” Another participant found that talking to her spouse helped her gain perspective:

> My husband is a member so I don’t have any feelings like I can’t talk to

> him. I find it helps to relieve stress, makes me less anxious. If I don't have perspective on something or I can't figure out what I am feeling or why I am feeling it, when talking to him the result will be that I do get perspective on it.

Participants described having a spouse that is a member as extremely beneficial, using words like "it helps 100 percent," "he totally knows," "I can't imagine not being married to a member and trying to explain what I do without giving any detail because they don't understand the inner workings of the RCMP."

It was also felt by some of the participants that having spouses in the CJS helped because they were more able to talk to them about work because they had a security clearance, they offered an informed opinion, provided advice, and helped the participants gain perspective, all of which helped participants cope with ICE work.

Category 6c: Being with friends or family. Participants identified that close personal relationships were helpful in normalizing feelings and with finding balance and perspective. Being with people who cared and could offer unconditional love and support was seen to be very beneficial: "I seek out people that I know and trust" and "My family is the most important thing of the entire helping thing." One participant spoke about the importance of having friends outside the police force.

> When you are with a group of friends that are also police officers, it seems you can very easily get sucked into sharing stories all night. So having non-police friends is helpful because it just gets you out of it. You're not constantly working or talking about work and swapping stories.

Several of the participants described the importance of "connecting with others," "making time for friends," "having a strong support system outside of work," "getting together with family," and "getting home to the family" as helpful ways to cope with ICE work.

Category 7: Personal characteristics (24 incidents, 10 participants)

This category encompasses attributes individuals brought to the work that made them more suited. Four subcategories have emerged from the participants' descriptions: (a) Related Experience, (b) Specific Knowledge, (c) Being the Right Person for the Job, and (c) Not Being a Mother.

Category 7a: Related experience. The benefit of having previous similar work experience was described as helpful, as it provided tools to help individual team members cope. "I had a lot of dealings with predators so there is not a lot that surprises me now, because you've kind of seen a little bit of everything. So I think that helps." Participants with more experience have often been exposed to more courses, more training, and more information. "I've had a lot of good courses, a lot of good training, and a lot of good experience, so I feel very confident as an investigator."

Category 7b: Specific knowledge. Participants identified that having knowledge builds confidence, makes the work easier, and adds to the individual's understanding of the system. As ICE work is so specialized and requires investigators to have knowledge in a number of specialized areas, having that knowledge was seen as extremely helpful. "The knowledge of these files and how to investigate them properly. That is a huge coping mechanism. Once you're comfortable with doing them, they're a lot easier."

Category 7c: Being the right person for the job. Participants identified the importance of personal suitability as being very helpful. Characteristics included commitment, empathy, spirituality, passion and an interest in the work. "You have to have an interest. You have to have a passion and want to do it because I am becoming more and more interested, and it makes me want to attack the computer and learn more about it."

One participant described spirituality as helpful. "I think the spirituality again for helping is to have a strong belief, yes, there is a God up there, yes, that God has created all the good stuff and is not responsible for all the bad stuff that's happened." Conversely, a second participant described not being religious as helpful in coping with the work:

> I think it's good that I am not religious. To me it's good because I don't see people as deserving it or evil or like dirty or sinful. I mean in a sexual environment, we're talking about sex and stuff like that. That would compound it, I would think.

Having a passion for challenge is also a helpful characteristic, according to a few of the participants. "The job is very dynamic and hard and challenging and difficult and we are on the cutting edge of technology, and these guys are trying to beat us. So it's very interesting and challenging." Another participant describes these challenges as an opportunity to continue learning.

> I'm driven by the fascination of the investigations and how to piece it together to get the bad guy at the end or make it solid. How do I use what they are using and work with the tools that we have to make it a solid investigation and presentable for the rest of the world.

Category 7d: Not being a mother. Participants in this category identified that not having children or having older children made it easier to cope. Four of 14 participants (29% of the sample; three female, one male) raised this as a helpful factor. Three did not have children and one had older children.

> A lot of people express a sickness in their stomach or a disdain for it that I

> haven't really experienced, to be honest, in a huge way. I mean, obviously it disgusts me, but there's some people that react, and mostly I find the people that have kids directly, their own children, whether it's step children or children that they're biological parents to. Those people definitely are turned off in a different way. And I don't know if it's good or bad, but it enabled me to take a little more of an objective approach in that I'm not sickened to my stomach.

There was no mention about not being a father, nor were there comments from mothers of young children (also represented in the participant sample) indicating that this was specifically hindering from their perspective.

Category 8: Cognitive Strategies (23 incidents, 10 participants)

This category contains incidents involving deliberate strategies employed to avoid thinking about the material. This category was divided into three subcategories: (a) Leaving Work at Work; (b) Conscious Efforts to Avoid Intrusive Work-related Thoughts; and (c) Recognizing Limitations (role in the big picture).

Category 8a: Leaving work at work. The incidents in this category spoke to the importance of mentally leaving the work behind when the individual leaves work for the day. In conjunction, participants stressed the need to have a life outside of work.

> You have to make sure to enjoy life past this moment that you are here and don't take, live, die, and breathe this. There has to be a separation between what you do in your home life and to make sure that that stays intact.

Category 8b: Conscious efforts to avoid intrusive work-related thoughts. Participants described making an effort to think about something other than work was a helpful way to cope with the thoughts about ICE that could intrude during their time off. One participant found focusing on the positive was extremely helpful.

> Look for the good side of life and everything. I really appreciate what goes on in my life, and who I am, what I am, and things like that. It is very important for me to be able to look in the mirror and be proud of what I see.

Some of the participants also found that it was helpful to remind themselves that there are good people in the world. One participant identified spending time with positive people was especially helpful. “I go to the positive people. Spend time with the positive people. And you know, it’s like a breath of fresh air. Spending that time.”

One participant found it helpful to imagine the children in pictures were okay when viewing graphic images.

> When I’m viewing images of naked kids posing I like to imagine that they are fine, nothing happening to them, someone took a picture of them on a beach, or maybe some perv took a picture of his niece and nephew playing in the pool and never did anything. So they’re okay.

Another strategic method that some found quite helpful was to become aware of when thoughts intruded and to deliberately change those thoughts. “It did come into my mind during the weekend a little bit, but then I was able to say, “No, that’s work, let’s leave it there.”

Category 8c: Recognizing limitations (role in the big picture). Incidents in this category related to the importance of being realistic about what one person can do. The volume of work is so significantly overwhelming that participants said it was very important to come to terms with their own limitations.

> Say to yourself, you can only do what you can do. I mean, I'm one person amongst many that are working on it and you can only do what you can do. Every human is limited in what they physically can or can not do, just acknowledge the reality that it's happening out there, and do what you can do.

Participants were almost completely united in this opinion. One explained:

> Partly because of the nature of the work and it's just overwhelming the amount and the lack of resources that we have. I would strongly recommend taking a page out of the AA manual, that is, try and take it one day at a time. You can only do what you can do on any given day. You can't do anything more. Just one day at a time.

Making peace with the fact that there are limits to each person's ability to help seemed to be a process that many had come to terms with, in order to cope with the volume and reality of ICE work. Several participants described having to come to terms with the fact that they leave work at the end of each day knowing there are children out there being horribly victimized continually. The burden is huge. In order to survive, one participant relayed a conversation she had with a friend.

> She was dealing with kids who were living on the street. I said "How do you do this? How do you come home at night when you know there's a kid on the street?" and she says, "If I can't take care of myself and keep myself healthy, I'm no good to them." So I was like, "Hey, good attitude," and I have adopted that attitude ever since. Makes sense. I'm allowed to live, I'm allowed to do my part, and most people don't do what I do during the day so I'm doing my part.

Another participant pragmatically outlined this philosophy:

> You can be emotional when it comes to these things, but you can't solve the world's problems, and you're not going to, and you never will. That you're just one guy plugging that one little hole in the sprinkler. Accept your place in it.

Category 9: Organizational Support (21 incidents, 8 participants)

This category contains incidents related to things the organization provided that assisted members in doing their jobs to the best of their abilities. These items enhanced job performance, increased confidence, and saved time. This category was divided into three subcategories: (a) Training, (b) Equipment, and (c) Technical Support.

Category 9a: Training. Factors related to training such as availability and importance of training; the benefits of training for increasing safety, instilling confidence, promoting team cohesion, and providing structure during tense situations; and the benefit of learning from others, are included in this category. Many of the participants found that training was very helpful. Some participants in this category referred to the benefits of ICE-related training they had received. Other participants made reference to previous training and how it helped them to cope.

> Of course training is very helpful. I took the ICE course earlier this year. That was very helpful because of course you get different ideas, and so many more people doing the same thing, people that have been doing it longer and in different provinces. Everybody has a different way of doing things that those of us here may not have thought of yet. So that was helpful, to be able to be with a group of other investigators, and share their ideas and what-not.

Many of the participants commented on the availability and the quality of the training they have been provided. Other comments from participants included: “They see what training people are lacking when they come to the section, and try to get you on those courses. So that helps keep everyone up to standard.” Additionally, those trained together found that that experience added to the cohesiveness of the unit. Training also increased safety and confidence levels for those doing the job.

Category 9b: Equipment. Incidents in this category related to the availability of equipment, how forthcoming equipment was when requested, and the time saving that occurred when participants had access to proper equipment. According to the participants who provided incidents relating to this category, having the right equipment (such as specific computer programs) was fundamental to being able to do the work. There was a sense from the participants that equipment was forthcoming and available. “Proper equipment helps. So we do have proper equipment. And that helps because it alleviates us going outside of the office to do our work or relying on other people to supply us with the avenues to view things.”Another participant had a similar perspective: “We have everything we need. We are equipped. Other than having a lab here at our end of things, that’s about it, which isn’t a possibility. If we don’t have it, then we just didn’t think of it.” Having available equipment facilitated ICE work and, as a result, helped team members cope with the work.

Category 9c: Technical support. Incidents in this category relate to the benefits of having skilled technical support, including the significant time saving aspect when using a technical support person on investigations and the usefulness to the ICE unit investigator.

Participants commented on the incredibly technical nature of ICE investigations.

Many unit members rely upon the expertise and guidance of those specifically trained in the area of technical support for assistance on significant components of their investigations. As one participant described it, “The techie part of it is over my head. We have people and resources to go to, and when I need something, I go to them.”

Another participant commented on the helpful nature of the assistance and information that Technical Support offered.

> Not only are they able to offer advice on warrants and help us with the seizure, they can also cut down the long-term time because we don’t seize everything in the house. We’ll go there without as much knowledge and we’ll think, “Well, we’d better get this, we’d better seize this” and we end up seizing everything that looks related. Whereas you get a tech guy there and he will tell you, “Oh no, you don’t need that. There’s nothing going to be on that.”

The availability of technical support was seen to be a tremendous asset that went a long way toward helping the ICE team to cope with the work.

Category 10: Supervision (20 incidents, 11 participants)

This category contains incidents related to helpful supervision. The category was divided into two subcategories: (a) Excellent Supervisors, and (b) Supervisors Understand and Respect the Impact of ICE Work.

Category 10a: Excellent supervisors. The incidents in this category addressed characteristics of good supervision, including supervisors with an open-door policy. One participant described her impression of the quality of supervision in the ICE unit:

> It’s pretty much an open-door policy around here, it’s being able to approach NCOs and bosses and stuff so that’s good. The things that need

> to be changed get changed. It makes the job easier because people are more satisfied, more productive.

In addition to being available, good two-way communication, soliciting feedback from unit members and keeping the team working together were all identified as helpful to participants. According to one participant:

> We are kept in the loop. We are part of the decision-making. They just don't go and make unilateral decisions and then kind of hand it down to you saying, "Okay, we've changed it, now we are doing this instead." Because we are fluid, we are growing and learning. They actually keep everybody together and say, "Well this has worked and this hasn't. What do you suggest we do now?" A very, very important part of a team is to be kept together.

Participants talked about the quality of supervision received on the ICE unit in glowing terms. They referred to their supervisor as "spectacular," and "phenomenal." Participants said they felt trusted, respected and motivated. Participants identified their supervisor as "respected," "someone who knows what they're doing," and "has experience." According to one, "I wouldn't work for someone else."

Category 10b: Supervisors understand and respect the impact of ICE work. The other area that clearly emerged in the category of supervision was the experience of participants that supervisors understood the impact of ICE work and managed the unit accordingly. This was helpful in that participants felt a comfort level in being open about how they were coping. They felt supported in taking the steps they needed in the moment to look after themselves. Supervisors encouraged the use of self care strategies, showed an understanding about the workload, encouraged team members to access outside help, and made a point of minimizing exposure to graphic materials whenever possible. One of the participants described their experience of the support in this way:

> The biggest thing for help here is of course the help from the supervisors. That's paramount. That they hear, they treat you like an adult, and they don't dictate that you're going to do this, this, this and this. They encourage you to be aware of your own reactions. If you say "That's it, I've got to walk out of here," then you're out of here. And they understand that you take what you can take, everything's individual, and some people can take some of it, some people can't, some people can take it on a certain day and other days they can't. It's a personal thing in terms of the ability to deal with it at certain times and certain days.

Another participant described the supportive and accepting attitude supervisors demonstrated toward staff that may be affected.

> You know, because it's safe. They're not going to judge you. You know they are not going to hold you back. If anything, they see it as a strength because you recognize, you're seeing a problem in yourself, and you've now got to deal with it. And that's really comforting to know that they see it as a strength and not a weakness.

Category 11: Humour (18 incidents, 11 participants)

The vast majority of participants in this study reported that they regularly used humour as a tool to help them cope with work on the ICE team. During the interviews, participants identified three specific uses for humour: (a)Use of Humour to Feel Good, (b) Humour as a Stress Reliever, and (c) Humour as a way to Shift Thinking During Intense Moments.

Category 11a: Use of humour to feel good. Participants described feeling much better after laughing, in part because it causes them to take in more oxygen. “I’m always up for a good laugh. It physically feels good. Just having a good belly laugh, obviously it brings oxygen, which is what I need because I tend not to breathe when I get upset.”

Category 11b: Humour as a stress reliever. Participants also talked about using humour as an effective way of relieving stress. One participant described it as an “escape valve,” another, “The laughing itself. I tend to feel more relaxed after having a big bout of laughter. I physically relax. It seems to release the physical tension.” One participant described his thoughts on laughter in this way:

> I think it just takes the stress away, you can’t be too serious about yourself. You look at life and you could sit there and drive yourself nuts thinking about everything that’s bad in the world, but if you can look at it and laugh...

11c: Humour as a way to shift the mind during intense moments. Incidents in this category involved the use of humour to change the feeling of a moment. Participants felt that humour was an effective tool that helped them shift their thinking into a better state of mind.

> Emotionally it releases my tension. If I am particularly under the gun about something or particularly disgusted by a piece of evidence I’ve come upon, it takes the toxicity out of that evidence or that moment, whatever it is.

Other participants described using humour to “snap you out of what you have been into for a bit, and then it just kind of lightens everything up, and then you can go back at it almost with a fresher look.” Another participant also described the use of humour in this way:

> It puts a smile on my face and makes me laugh. It just lightens your mood and it takes you away from the actual offence itself. It just kind of separates the offence from what you are able to think about.

Other participants described using humour as an effective way to distract the mind. For example,

> It deflects from the images, so that your brain is actually concentrating on the laughter and the humour rather than on the images. You're still obviously doing the job and getting it done, but you're focus is not so intense and so concentrated on the images itself.

Category 12: Candidate Selection (18 incidents, 13 participants)

Participants identified a number of criteria that should be considered when selecting candidates for an ICE unit. This category is divided into two subcategories: (a) Selecting the Right People for the Job, and (b) Showing Images as a Pre-Screening Tool.

Category 12a: Selecting the right people for the job. Incidents in this category involved the importance of selecting the right individuals for this type of specialized work. This included considering candidates' previous experience, their ability to handle job-specific stresses, and their degree of self-motivation.

> People that come into the unit have to be specialized in some way, whether it is a tech background or a sex background or – you can't just take secondments out of GD (general duty – uniform work). It's a specialized unit and you just waste valuable time training people if they are not suitable.

Selecting the right candidates was seen by many participants as critical to the success of the unit and the health of the candidate. Several participants identified a requirement for candidates to be self-motivated in addition to the other factors.

> I think the person's background and their investigative experience, and what their performance is like, different things like that. Because it's a unit where there's so much work that - it can't be someone that needs tons of supervision.

Participants also identified that candidates need to have initiative, that they cannot just sit back and wait for things to be done. They also need to be the types of individuals who can work with the hardships that come from Crown counsel and the judicial system, such as the current requirements to view and document each image, the antiquated law and the lax sentences handed down for these crime types.

Category 12b: Showing images as a pre-screening tool. Participants identified the importance of exposing candidates to images as part of a pre-screening process. Several of the participants had had the opportunity to see images of child sexual abuse prior to coming on to the unit, and found it was the only way to determine if they could cope.

> One of the things that happened was the person in charge of the interviewing process here asked me if I wanted to take a look at some of the images to make sure of myself, that I'd be able to handle this. And I took him up on that offer because it actually was a question in my own mind, and you know, I'm glad he identified it. I felt it was helpful in terms of putting me at ease knowing whether I could deal with it or not. And of course, these weren't the worst images imaginable, but they were definitely without question, legally child pornography.

Other participants have seen unit members come and go rather rapidly because they are not able to cope with the images. Out of concern for the candidates, participants felt it would be useful for candidates to find out what their personal responses would be prior to being transferred to the unit.

> I think that there's people that have been in the ICE section that weren't suited to it. So I think that the interview should include some of the images we see. Because you can get over looking at a few images versus being in the wrong job and looking at stuff for months and months and months, coming out and being a person that just isn't the person any more for a long period of time.

Categories that Describe what Hinders Coping with ICE Work

Twelve main categories with 35 subcategories emerged from the 349 incidents that hinder coping with ICE work. These categories are described in order of frequency of incidents with categories having a higher degree of frequency being described first. This is not a reflection of the importance of these categories, just a reflection of the commonality between participants in terms of what they discussed during these interviews.

The following table is a summary of the categories and participant participation in each of the categories. The table contains the category name, incident, and participant frequencies. These frequencies are the number of incidents and participants associated with each category. The table frequencies are also provided as percentages (see Table 3).

Table 3

Incidents that Hinder Coping with Integrated Child Exploitation Work

Category of incident	Number of incidents (percentage of total)	Number of participants (percentage of total)
1. Impacts of ICE work	110 (32%)	13 (93%)
2. Criminal Justice System	42 (12%)	10 (71%)
3. Viewing	36 (10%)	12 (86%)
4. Lack of resources	35 (10%)	11 (79%)
5. Psychological interventions	33 (97%)	12 (86%)
6. Organizational factors	32 (9%)	12 (86%)
7. Workload	24 (7%)	9 (64%)
8. Technology	16 (5%)	4 (28%)
9. Newness of unit	10 (3%)	4 (28%)
10. Government policies/ international challenges	9 (3%)	4 (28%)
11. Working on lengthy file	9 (3%)	6 (43%)
12. Lack of societal understanding of the seriousness of ICE	7 (2%)	3 (21%)

Category 1: Impacts of ICE Work (110 incidents, 13 participants)

Incidents in this category relate to the cognitive, physical, and social impact of working on the ICE unit. Symptoms of increased paranoia, intrusive thoughts and/or flashbacks, re-experiencing, somatic complaints and tiredness were described by participants. In addition, changes in thinking about child exploitation and the behaviour of others toward ICE team members were discussed. Eleven subcategories were identified within this overarching category. The eleven subcategories are: (a) Awareness of the Horror/ Scope of the Work, (b) Physical and Emotional Impact on Self and Home Life, (c) Intrusive Images and Thoughts About the Material, (d) Response of Others to ICE Work, (e) Can't Talk About the Images, (f) Concerns About Team Members Leaving the Unit, (g) Guilt About Leaving the Unit, (h) Impact of Seeing Colleagues Stressed and Upset, (i) Protectiveness/ Mistrust of Others, (j) Protectiveness/ Paranoia Regarding Own Children, (k) Thoughts About the Perpetrator.

Category 1a: Awareness of the horror/ scope of the work. Participants described the impact of developing an awareness of the scope and reality of child exploitation.

> And it was like a huge education the first week. I was just walking around with my mouth open thinking, "God…." But if this person can get it, any five year old could get on there, there on the computer and have access to all this stuff. So that was a huge education for me.

Participants frequently mentioned that the reality of what is truly going on out in the world is very different from what most believe is happening. Images of child sexual abuse range from still pictures of children posed in a sexually provocative manner through a continuum to audio and videotape of rape and torture of children of every age, to on-line live rape and torture of very young infants. Several participants mentioned that unless these images are seen, it is just not possible to realize the horrors that are happening to children.

> I do not believe that anyone can understand how bad it is until they've seen it. No matter what they say, even if they think they can, they can't. So if they haven't seen it, then they don't understand what I am talking about.

Several participants commented on the surprising prevalence of these crimes:

> I don't think people understand how much is going on out there all the time. I think people think that because they are starting a specialized unit, they'll be working on specialized cases without realizing the number of cases that are thrown out from detachments, because there are just so many. Like the amount of people who are on the internet trying to lure children, it's just incredible.

According to another participant:

> I read one thing from the British Parliament where I think somebody had said there was about six thousand new images put on in child pornography, or pornography added every day. That's astounding. So you just feel like you're really, with your little finger in the hole in the dike, and just having to pray and rely on faith.

Participants also described the amount of work involved in each investigation. Because of the mountain of evidence attached to many of these files, some of the ICE investigations have tied up groups of individuals for over two years on one single file. Knowing there is a real possibility of being drawn into such lengthy investigations has the potential to add a layer of fear for the investigators.

> There's a concern that you are going to run into a mountain of evidence, which is a major issue with a lot of these files. I think there's a fear with every single one of these that's sitting here, it could be the next two-year project, and no one knows until you get into the guy's computer or house. Unlike going to a house and searching for a gun or a jacket for a shooting, you're in and out and bingo, you've got your evidence and charge the guy. These files, you have no idea.

Several of the participants also expressed concern for the victims. All of the images the participants view represent offences that have already taken place. "Their lives have been changed dramatically in that one moment. They can never go off and be innocent the way they should be." As another participant reported,

> You don't recognize the impact on society, down the road, that these victims are going to have to society in the future. They're going to be victims – they're going to be on the street as hookers. They're going to be requiring psychological services. Are they going to be viable members of society in the future? Are they going to be the people with drug and alcohol problems and the unsustainable relationships? So the one thing is, you see that here, the impact this has for the general populace, the society.

Category 1b: Physical and emotional impact on self and home life. Incidents in this category relate to the symptoms experienced as a result of being in this work, the impact on home, family and relationships. Several of the participants described feeling exhausted and emotionally drained.

> You just want to sit down, you just want to go home and you don't want to hear another human voice, almost. You just want to sit down and fall

> asleep probably, but you've got obligations to your family, but your physical and mental capacity at that time is just drained.

Some of the participants reported changes in their sleeping patterns, feeling more distant toward their partners, and noticing they have been isolating themselves from others.

> I have a mental list of people that I have to call that I haven't spoken to in over a year. So I think that is certainly hindering. It's not healthy. I literally come to work and then I go home. I come to work, I come home. And on the weekends you are running errands and getting ready for the next work week. It's not as balanced as it was a few years ago.

Other symptoms such as headaches, terrible mood, emotional eating, not wanting to engage in extracurricular activities, not wanting to check personal e-mails, poor communication with family, feeling angry, having a need to be in control of everything in their personal life, and a feeling of intense stress, were experienced by several of the participants.

> I am just a bitch to everyone, my mom, my dad, my husband; people I would talk to about it. I'm just a bitch to them instead because I am in such a bad mood, I can't talk about it. So that is a negative impact for sure.

Category 1c: Intrusive images and thoughts about the material. Participants described the impact ICE work has on their thinking. Some experienced thoughts intruding while they were engaged in other activities, or experienced nightmares, flashbacks and triggers.

Several of the participants experienced intrusive thoughts. Although they are aware this is a normal reaction, it remained quite upsetting to them.

> Like why is it popping into my head because that's just creepy, and then I start thinking, "Okay, is this normal?" and then you know I know it is normal because we were told it's normal, but then I just get upset with myself. Because even though we were told it's normal, it's still in my mind not normal. And it doesn't happen a lot, but it does happen. And I would say two years ago it never happened, because I didn't think something like this really existed.

Another participant describes experiences with intrusive thoughts:

> When you see really bad things, it literally is like posttraumatic stress disorder. You'll replay it in your mind, and it will come back to you. When I first saw that thing, I would go to bed thinking about it and I would wake up thinking about it. I'd wake up and feel all relaxed and like, "Oh," and then I would think of that. It was like there was something missing from my day if I didn't think about it.

One participant reported that the act of describing each image when preparing cases for court was hindering, in that it reinforced the image in the mind.

> I have to describe everything to the minute detail and I was actually told that sometimes I go overboard, which for court purposes is not overboard and they like it, but you have to look at in real life and then you have to describe it. Once you describe it, it's burnt in your memory. It's there.

A few of the participants described having to do tasks at home to keep their minds busy to keep the intrusive thoughts at bay. Some of the participants also described how they can be triggered by other sights, sounds or actions in their daily lives.

> When you're in a mall and you hear a kid having a tantrum in Sears or whatever, most people are like, "Oh God, poor mom," or "Kid's having a tantrum." Like specially if they see it and the kid is just all red in the face or whatever, they are having a tantrum. I think of a child being raped. Even if I know it's the mom and they are not being taken, everything is fine. I just think that's the sound a child makes when they are being raped.

Category 1d: Response of others to ICE work. This category contains incidents relating to the way some people respond to ICE team members once they find out what they do. Several of the participants described engaging others in conversation and having them turn away with discomfort upon learning of their work.

> I remember bringing it up at a wedding not long ago, sitting next to this couple from back east and she asked me what I did and I said it and she just went, "No way," and turned away… Originally I felt bad because I thought I should shut up. I should couch what I do a little more objectively or a little more – just out-and-out not being truthful about it. But I don't like to lie about it. It's not a big secret what we do and I think it's good what we do, so people should know it.

Another participant found this attitude hinders social relationships, which can create a feeling of social isolation.

> When they find out what you do, it's a whole other thing. "What do you do again?" "In child exploitation." "Oh what's that?" "You know, like the internet." They, "Oh." They don't know what to say because it is so terrible.

Participants in this category found that attitude even extended to some degree into the realm of law enforcement, finding similar responses from other police officers.

> You can’t talk about it. You can’t go anywhere other than here, even for policing, or into the general public. I’ve come to the point where I just tell them I’m in Major Crime. Because you tell any individual, and if they pursue it past the point of what you actually do and you say, listen, I’m in Child Exploitation, it’s virtually the end of the conversation. It’s done, it’s over. They don’t want to know anymore.

According to some of the participants, child exploitation exceeds the threshold of what people in our society feel is moral. They know it happens, but they do not want to talk about it.

> It's not a subject that anybody wants to approach or be involved in. So you won't have the support system, you don't have anything there that anybody can rely on, now, because they don't want to hear it. They don't want to see it; they don't want to know about it. They understand clearly that it's there and it exists, but it's not something -- can we talk about a body that's been found in a field and burnt? Absolutely, no problem whatsoever. Can we talk about a two-year old that's in a house being sexually assaulted by her father? Nobody's going to want to talk to you about it. There is a line of morals that people have and this passes those morals of what they're capable to deal with in a rational and simple way.

Category 1e: Can’t talk about the images. The images are so horrific the participants are unable to talk about what they see with their family or friends, because it would traumatize those they talk to about it. Some participants even expressed a reluctance to talk to other members of the ICE team, for fear of hearing an even worse story and becoming more traumatized themselves.

> This is the first time I've ever encountered something that you can't talk about. You really can't talk about it because it will upset other people. It's not just that it's a secret and you're a police officer, it's actually going to upset people and make it worse for you because you end up having to explain it.

For participants who use talking as one of their coping mechanisms, not being able to talk about what they are exposed was extremely detrimental.

> It hinders coping in every way you can imagine, in terms of one, you really can't talk about it then, and you really need to talk about it. So you really need the coping mechanism and you can't use it.

Category 1f: Concerns about team mates leaving the unit. Incidents in this category relate to participants' concerns over those who leave the unit suddenly without explanation and do not return, and their worry about those who have left.

> We've had some situations here where you come to work and you find somebody's not coming back, nothing was said. To – you know, whether it was your business or not. But it just kind of leaves people wondering, if they are coming back, and I'm sure a lot of the NCOs never knew either when their personnel were coming back.

Some participants describe team members leaving the unit suddenly because they could not handle the job. This has led some to express a need for better pre-screening processes. "They should have a pre-screening before they come here, because people are losing it here. They've already lost it here. We are just not able to handle it."

Category 1g: Guilt about leaving the unit. Some of the participants expressed feeling such a strong sense of responsibility to the victims and to their team that they felt guilty when thoughts of leaving the unit come into their own minds. This guilt appears to be related to the fact that the unit is running short, the workload is so high, not wanting to leave the close family they are a part of, and a feeling that they are abandoning the victims.

> The negative thing is, you look at your job, you realize yes, it's a forewarning, but then there's times you think, my God if only I could win the big lottery, and just turn it all in, walk away from it, and spend the rest of my life – not having to worry about having a job, sort of thing. Even then you'd still almost feel guilty that you're turning your back on people and victims and all this.

Category 1h: Impact of seeing colleagues stressed and upset. Items in this category relate to seeing team mates impacted by the work and the effect that has on the participants. Due to the degree of exposure to potentially traumatizing materials, participants witness other members of their team being affected by the work on a regular basis:

> I know one of the officers here was working on a file over the weekend, and had viewed 350,000 images. And the irritability was unreal – from the person we saw normally, and the change was like, night and day. If you just see the difference, and you could physically see it. And it took a few days for that officer to get back down again – the anger is just sitting there.

Another participant described the importance of the team looking out for one another because of the impact of the work.

> They might not admit it, but you can see it. You can see it in their work

> ethic, you can see it in the way they treat their other team mates, or how they talk about treating their spouses. So not only do we have our own jobs, but we also have to watch our team mates.

Some of the participants described the impact of seeing their team members stressed and upset. According to one, “It hinders me because I care strongly about these people and I don’t like to see them stressed and anxious. It makes me sad. It upsets me because I like them.”

Category 1i: Protectiveness/ mistrust of others. Incidents in this category relate to the increased or enhanced vigilance, distrust, and suspicion participants feel toward others. One participant explained it this way:

> How that's affected me, is the pervert-around-every-corner syndrome. Walking down the street -- I mean, I was looking at the floor anyway, but it heightens that again. You know, walking down the street at night, running at night, - well, I don't do it. But you know, running alone during the day, it's heightened my awareness, and not in a positive way, of what's around me. I feel more concerned and more anxious about my surroundings.

A question of male sexuality came out in some of the interviews with participants. One of the participants said “I don’t trust men like I would have before.” Another said “It gives me doubt, or greater doubt, I should say about male sexuality which makes me less trusting of male sexuality and therefore men, which would not be a good thing.” And another

> You start questioning the Y chromosome, the male sexuality. I remember my youngest had a birthday party and I had taken him and a

> bunch of kids to one of the pools for a pool party. I sat on the sidelines, just sort of sitting there and I watched and I thought, “Dollars to doughnuts there are pedophiles.” Because I know that they congregate in these leisure centres and pools.

Other participants identified they felt more paranoid, others more suspicious of people they do not know, and of becoming angry at parents who do not care for their children properly. Some of the participants also described feeling compelled to educate others on how to keep their children safe. “I’ll tell them don’t put them in a daycare unless you absolutely research it. Or be careful when you are in a parking lot. Scan around and look to see if there’s any single people there who don’t belong.” One participant talked about having developed a different perspective because of the work. “I’m an outspoken person so I tell people what I think and that hinders, because they don’t see what I see. And nor should they, but it’s just understanding that perspective.”

Category 1j: Protectiveness/ paranoia regarding own children. Some participants with children described that they felt more paranoid about their own children after coming to the ICE unit. One mentioned, “It affects me in my relationship with people who have contact with my children.” Another said, “The negative is that I am overly protective of my kids.” And, “I worry about the kids more. I don’t let them do a lot of the things that I would like to let them, like go to the park on their own. I think that’s definitely because I work here. I’m more aware of it.” One participant found that having the knowledge of what preferential child molesters can do to children has added another layer of fear:

> You are always sort of worried. “Oh, someone is going to snatch my kid,” but now I take it a step further in that “Oh, I know somebody could

> potentially snatch my kid." Now, I know what they would actually do to him. Which makes it even worse.

Category 1k: Thoughts about the perpetrator. Incidents in this category relate to the thoughts participants have towards the perpetrators. Some of the participants spend time trying to figure out why the perpetrators do what they do and what they are getting from engaging in these crimes.

> I guess you are really left with a feeling of "What is this person all about? Is there any hope for them?" and "How did they get this way?" "What happened in their life to bring them to this point?" "Why is it you've got some adults, a guy 40 or 50, that gets his sexual gratification from seeing a six-month-old do things?"

Other participants have described feeling intense rage and anger toward perpetrators. One described this: "Now I physically am repulsed by them and feel frustration and anger, and I have moments where I want to hurt them."

Category 2: Criminal Justice System (42 incidents, 10 participants)

This category contains incidents relating to the CJS's lack of understanding about ICE investigations. This results in a number of hindering factors for ICE team members. The incidents in this category were divided into three subcategories. They are: (a) Lack of Understanding about Child Exploitation, (b) Effects of the Criminal Justice System Requirements on the ICE Unit, and (c) Minimal or No Punishment for Perpetrators.

Category 2a: Lack of understanding about child exploitation. A majority of participants expressed very strongly that the CJS requirements reflect a clear lack of understanding about child exploitation and child exploitation investigations. Currently ICE team members are required to document each image and each frame of video or

DVD. The time required to view and document every image is absolutely staggering and extremely hindering to ICE investigations.

> There are 300,000 images on the computer. There's no way you can do that in a day. You can't do that in a month, right? And Crown wants the ratings. There's been days where I've had to sit there and look at it for eight or more hours. It's definitely not healthy to sit and look at that stuff all day. But you're trying to get it done to satisfy outsiders who kind of don't really understand.

Participants contributing to this category consistently expressed frustration about the requirements and standards Crown Counsel and the courts continue to have for these cases, believing them to be completely unrealistic and not in keeping with the advancing technology. Due to the storage capabilities of digital files, collectors can have hundreds of thousands of images, videos, and DVDs. Investigators currently must rate each image and document each moment of video frame by frame. The time and resources it takes to complete one investigation can be absolutely staggering.

> If we have evidence in relation to an individual that has possession of child pornography or child exploitation or whatever the term you may use, if the individual has 300 images or half a gazillion, what's the difference? You have an individual that has it, proving what is completely in totality on their hard drive, the CDs and everything else is relevant but irrelevant.

Another participant provided the following example:

> We found about eight or nine items that were child pornography, and we had a Crown say, "Well, that isn't enough. I'm not really satisfied that this – if he had a lot more, fine, I'll lay the charge, but no, not with this." So

> you're wondering, well, what is the definitive level of when you're charging and when your not?

Participants expressed great frustration in the lack of understanding and talked about the need to have a dedicated Crown. Having a specific Crown Counsel dedicated full time to ICE files would allow Crown the opportunity to develop the knowledge and expertise required to prosecute ICE cases. The process of having a charge laid and proceeding through the system becomes exhausting for participants because of the continual education they must provide for the different Crown Counsel involved with each case.

> It hinders not having a dedicated Crown. So with every file you've got a different Crown, so every file we have to re-educate and we have to go through the whole disclosure issue about do we give defence the images, do we not give defence the images. You go through this every time. It's exhausting.

Another participant talked about the need for a dedicated Crown because of the amount of specialized knowledge that is required to prosecute these cases.

> Not having a dedicated Crown, they don't understand issues; the technology behind the case law associated to these types of investigations, or become experts related to these new forms of criminal law offences. That is critical to the success of all of these investigations.

One participant expressed frustration about the burden of knowing what is happening in the court system, but not being able to say anything about it.

> We are not allowed to say anything about it. Because we are in the RCMP we are not allowed to say to the media or say to our MLAs or to speak

> about "Hey, guess what? Maybe you guys don't get what's going on here?

Category 2b: Effects of the criminal justice system requirements on the ICE unit.

According to several of the participants, the lack of understanding and appreciation of ICE files by the CJS creates significant frustrations for team members, as they prevent investigators from stopping perpetrators and protecting the victims. Issues such as the considerable time involved, the newness of the law, the focus on the court process - not the victims, and a feeling that Crown is not supporting efforts to prosecute these perpetrators are all contained within this category.

Frustration with the CJS is felt at a number of levels by participants. CJS requirements have shifted the focus away from the crime and the victims to the process itself.

> We know he's guilty. We know he's done it. We've got pictures of him yet we still have to go to court and say, "Here he is," and you have to get evidence admitted. If your evidence isn't admitted, it just goes on and on and on.

Participants expressed frustration with the lack of control they have and the difficulty they face with the standards that have been set. According to several participants, one little glitch and these perpetrators walk free. Having this knowledge places a great deal of pressure on investigators who must hope their investigations will hold up to the scrutiny of the courts.

> And ICE they look at these pictures and the guy is offending and they think, I'm writing it up but he's in court and he's pled not guilty. And it all boils down to that warrant. Was it good enough to get in and is it – the evidence is overwhelming but it's that court process – there's your

> hindrance. If your warrant isn't good enough, and it gets thrown out of court, you have no right to be in there, you have no right to have his stuff, he walks free and you have to give it back to him.

One participant described the focus they have to take with these investigations. "Your whole process and your whole focus is on the court and doing well in court, and it's not defending the victim, it's not putting the guy in jail, it's the court process itself." One participant said the focus of the courts has shifted from the perpetrator to the investigator.

> When you get into these investigations, they've gotten to be so complicated, as they say, as an investigator, it's not the accused who is on trial, it's you as the investigator. It's your case that's on trial. Over the years I have seen that evolve, that your preparation for cases, everything you do, has gotten so involved, to almost the point of being ridiculous.

Category 2c: Minimal or no punishment for perpetrators. Many of the participants also described incidents related to the judiciary's lack of understanding and appreciation of child exploitation as a serious crime. This results in little or no penalties, and often the release of perpetrators which then provides them the opportunity to continue offending.

Participants expressed frustration at the lack of punishment handed down by the courts, even when they finally see convictions.

> I felt really good about that (the conviction). And then he just got sentenced on October 16th and he got a conditional sentence for one year. Yeah. He doesn't have to submit fingerprints, doesn't have to do anything, doesn't have to be added to the sex offender registry because he said, "Oh,

> that would be just too traumatizing for him" and the judge agreed. So he get's nothing. It's like a total roller coaster. On the one hand you're like, "I totally got you." And then on the other hand you're like, "No, I didn't."

Several of the participants expressed frustration that judges refuse to view images of child sexual abuse related to the case they are trying, preferring instead, the clean, analytical version provided by written descriptions. As a result, a great deal of time and effort goes into describing each image as accurately as possible, in the hopes that the words will match the effectiveness of seeing the actual images. This practice, born out of a desire to protect the judiciary from becoming traumatized, calls in to question their ability to hand down proper sentences. Several of the participants indicated the fact that judges are not seeing the material leads to lighter sentences. According to one participant, "Judges need to take these seriously. They do not look at the material – so how can they sentence?" And another:

> Judges who don't want to view it. How can you make a decision on something if you don't want to view it? How can you decide on the severity of something if you don't want to view it? They want to see written descriptions of it. That's ludicrous. Like, get your head out of the sand.

There are many incidents related to lax sentences. One participant expressed a concern that Canada is seen as a haven for this type of activity. "Because we do have lighter sentences and our age of consent is only 14. And it's known to be a place where people will lure from, that are into young girls specifically." According to one participant:

> There's a whole frustration with the justice system, in that time and time

> again you nail people that are doing, you know, that don't want to follow the rules of society, and they observe little or no punishment. They're not removed from society, they continue to be out there, and away they go. So that's a kind of frustration.

Category 3: Viewing (36 incidents, 12 participants)

This category contains incidents from participants related to viewing graphic material. Participants identified viewing as an important, but often extremely hindering aspect of their jobs. In order to organize the key themes that emerged, this category has been divided into three subcategories. They are: (a) Viewing/ Exposure, (b) Lack of Mental Preparation, and (c) Viewing Video with or without Sound.

Category 3a: Viewing/ exposure. Incidents in this category relate to what hinders when viewing materials, including the impact of on-line live viewing, the age of the victim, hearing stories, viewing when tired or menstruating, and the impact of seeing new perversions.

All of the participants contributing to this category found viewing graphic images and video of child sexual abuse to be incredibly hindering. While they were often able to maintain a professional focus, not one of them could see how viewing was helpful in any way aside from providing them with a completely graphic account of the harm that was being perpetrated against the victims.

Participants have described a continuum of viewing from still photos to video and on-line live viewing. Although viewing still photos is at one end of the continuum, it can still be very difficult to see many of the images. One participant described that in addition to simply viewing a still photo, an added hindrance is the awareness ICE team members have of the things that happen to children that they bring to the image. This awareness is developed through repeated exposure to a wide range of visual and auditory information through the course of their duties.

> I guess with still photos, you're seeing the results or you've seen it in progress, you're imagining or having let your imagination fill in a few blanks for you, which in itself is very unpleasant because you are imagining, "Well, what else has this guy done? What was he doing a few seconds before this picture was taken? What's he going to do? What did he do right after the picture was taken?"

Some of the more hindering aspects of viewing included viewing very young child victims. Several of the participants discussed how viewing images with very young children was more difficult.

> If they're teenagers over 14, I can handle it because I think they're a bit more in control, in my mind. They're not willing participants per se, but it's different when they're kids and they obviously, babies have no say in the matter, or even toddlers, little kids. So I can handle adult pornography or pubescent kids, but just not the little ones, just because I know they have no say.

Some of the participants also found that viewing when tired or menstruating made it more difficult to be objective, the participant then viewing from more of an emotional place, which can take its toll.

> You always try to look at it analytically because that's what you have to do anyway, but sometimes if you are tired or you're not focused or you've got lots of interruptions, you end up looking at it emotionally as well. [The emotion] jumps in there sometimes, especially when you get really bad

> images, or videos.

According to several of the participants, viewing becomes far more difficult when an emotional connection is made with the victim, either through personalizing – making mental connection between the child and another, or by feeling an emotional connection with the victim.

> When I look at that specific image, the wall has to go up. Take your eyes off the victim's eyes because the eyes are the windows to the soul. And I think the thing that gets to people is the pain and expression in the eyes. You have to get your concentration off of that – that's when you have that emotional connection.

The quantity of material that needs to be viewed can also be extremely hindering. Although taking breaks is encouraged and individuals are cautioned to put a limit on the amount of viewing that is done each day, it is not always possible because of the work-load. Also the reality is that this requirement to limit viewing has not been enforced.

> When something has a deadline, or you have all this work to do, you have a computer with say like a hundred thousand images of child pornography on it, so you literally have to sit in a room for three weeks straight and stare at it all day long, and rate it, because you have to, you can't leave. So you not only have the stress of needing to get something done, but the thing you have to get done is view child pornography.

A computer program has been developed to assist the ICE team with viewing. The intention is to decrease the amount of viewing that must be done, as the program is designed to scan through images quickly and pick up new images. Some participants spoke about this computer program during the interview, but despite the presence of the program, they were still required to view many of the images.

> All it does is it will try and put your photos into a category. You still have to view it and you still have to say, yes, without a doubt it is consistent with a child between the ages of this and this. The computer can't do that. And this is the background and this is the photograph of the house, and here's the wall, and here I matched this with this. So no, you have to view it.

Investigators are required to view images in order to claim they are subject matter experts for court. They also must view as the computer is not able to accurately identify ages of children from a range of cultures because of the different rates of maturation.

> You can't put that on a resume that you've viewed millions and pictures and rated them if this computer is going to do it for you. And how does a computer know a pre-pubescent Chinese girl from a pre-pubescent Caucasian? It doesn't. Because Caucasian females actually develop a lot quicker than anybody and at ten years old right now, the maturation rate, they are more mature physically at ten than any other country. So you have to be able to sit there and say that.

The work area itself was described as hindering by some of the participants as they are required to sit in a closed room, often alone.

> You have to be in a closed area because the images you are viewing are very graphic and you can't have just anybody walk by and see them. So you are sitting in a room by yourself most of the time.

Viewing alone, as opposed to with other ICE staff, was described as hindering by some of the participants, as they are not able to talk about what they are seeing, or help each other remain focused on the evidence.

> You are by yourself. Humans are creatures that need to talk and be with somebody, and you are sitting there by yourself watching horrific acts happen to a child. Even as a police officer you have to talk with another human being or you need to share it with another human and you can't.

The impact of having to read stories written by perpetrators was described by a few of the participants as incredibly disturbing. According to one participant

> I find the stories difficult to do. You have to read the whole story and it's just – some of the things you would never see in a video are in stories because it's just fantasy. It's all fantasy. It's all made up. So the most grotesque and barbaric and disturbing things people can write about but you can't see are in these stories.

Category 3b: Lack of mental preparation. This category contains incidents related to not being able to prepare mentally prior to viewing. Some participants talked about the impact of coming across images they were not prepared for. One example emerged from discussion of the inoculation session held earlier that month. Some of the participants had been told the images that were going to be shown were ones they had already seen. When participants attended the session they were shown images they had not seen. This was very impacting to some.

> And then some people had been told that the images were things they've seen before. And again, other people didn't even know there were going to be images. So it was quite a shock. Some people said it was a shock when they saw the images. They had expected that they had seen them before and they were unprepared then, when they realized they hadn't seen them

> before, and that this was different than what they had previously seen.

The hindering aspect of being unprepared was also described by one participant who had spent months going through hundreds of videos. Through the course of reviewing all of the videos, the participant had developed an awareness of the victims and the types of actions this perpetrator was involved in. He had finished reviewing many videos that were copies of commercial movies, establishing an expectation in his mind, when

> Suddenly in this box I get three videos in a row that are directly related to sexual assaults against victims. So it's sort of – bang, and there's no way to prepare, I've sort of been lulled into a sense of – I'm not going to hit anything and suddenly, I'm hitting it, and it's apprehension of "What the hell am I going to get next?"

This participant was not prepared for what came up in the video. There was also a new victim, and new acts the perpetrator was engaged in on the tapes. "And in this case, what's happening too is there's a new twist to what he is doing on these tapes, which I have not seen before." Not having the ability to prepare for what came up on these tapes added to the degree of impact experienced by the participant.

Category 3c: Viewing video with or without sound. This final category contains incidents related to the experience of viewing video with or without sound. Overall, participants contributing to this category identified that video was far more difficult to view than still pictures.

> Certainly video is the next worse, because there is actual action, you can see the expression on the child, you can see change, you can see the pain, you can see all of the different kinds of expressions that are coming from

> the victim.

As another participant described it:

> I think the worst thing with video, it makes it feel like you’re basically standing there and looking through a window, watching it occur as it happens, as you see it. There’s nothing left to the imagination.

Adding audio to the video only compounds the level of difficulty. Participants describe having a much more difficult time remaining objective with sound. “It’s hearing that little voice. It’s hearing the innocence. You can look at a picture and only imagine what that wee one is saying, but to actually hear it.” Several of the participants mentioned audio makes the experience more immersive. “You can actually hear what is being said, how it is being said, and the tone of voice. You can hear the actual verbal protestations from the child.” For participants viewing video with audio and adding a sadistic element was described as the worst.

Investigations with predators that share on-line and live offer additional challenges.

> You will have an individual that will be creating and abusing and exploiting children live for other individuals that have fantasies or desires related to child exploitation. Those become a different investigation to begin with, with a different importance related to them. You also have more of an association between the offence, the offender and the victim. They are at that given point in time, real.

In addition to the mental shift from gathering evidence to doing what is in the best interest of the victim, the immediacy and reality involved with investigations of video and live on-line exploitation makes it far more hindering for many of the investigators.

Category 4: Lack of Resources (35 incidents, 11 participants)

This category contains incidents related to lack of resources. The category has been divided into four separate sections: (a) Not Enough People Resources, (b) Lack of Technical Support Personnel, (c) Need to Select People with the Right Skill Set, and (d) Impact of the Lack of Resources on Team Members.

Category 4a: Not enough people resources. Incidents in this category involved the lack of people resources on the ICE team in British Columbia. Participants contributing to this category discussed the fact that the unit is seriously under-resourced. An agreement in principle was made to fund 54 members for the unit over three years when the ICE unit was initially approved for British Columbia. Three years later, in 2007, the unit is at 2005 staffing levels with 10 regular members and 3 public service employees.

> Nova Scotia has an ICE unit. They have 14 people. There’s a million people in Nova Scotia, one million. There are ten people for the entire province of British Columbia. It’s embarrassing. Sureté de Quebec, they have 45 ICE positions, 45. K Division has two ICE teams, a north and a south. And there’s British Columbia... people look to us.

Category 4b: Lack of Technical Support personnel. Several of the participants specifically discussed the lack of technical support personnel as extremely hindering to coping with ICE work. According to some of the participants, each child exploitation investigation is at the mercy of technology. One participant explained it this way:

> Electronic media, digital media, and digital data are the new forms of evidence that investigators preserve, collect and examine. ICE investigations build on evidence that can’t be touched or seen without the

> use of something that can interpret, relay and display the information on magnetic platters. Technical support is critical to these types of investigations.

Unfortunately, technical assistance is virtually absent on the unit. As one participant described it,

> There are two people provincially that do child exploitation issues and there would be one person that's dedicated to ICE issues. Between them they have 48 files that need forensic work. Each forensic file takes a minimum of eight weeks. So we have in excess of eight years that basically is in the queue. So between the two of them it's four years before any file would be concluded or finished. It is only going to get worse from this point forward.

As a result, participants expressed concern about the outcome of their investigations. "We do the seizure – then what? We have to wait 18 months for tech crime. The courts may not support the charge because of the delay. We are not servicing the victim."

In addition to analysing forensic evidence, technical support personnel also have the potential to offer much needed advice and direction to investigators in the field. Without their assistance, investigators end up attending on warrants and seizing everything they believe may be related – a lot of which the technical support person would have identified as unnecessary. Once seized, team members must then go through and document each and every piece of data collected for court purposes, image by image, frame by frame. Participants expressed that not having tech support available to attend with them was hindering.

> We often rely on people in our office who are very computer-savvy to attend on search warrants with us. And what should be taking place is that we should have someone from our Tech Crimes unit coming on those warrants too. That happens in other areas, but it doesn't happen here.

Category 4c: Need to select people with the right skill set. In addition to not having enough resources, due to the specialized nature of these investigations, participants contributing to this category expressed a need to have the right people with the right skills selected for the unit.

> Getting everybody to understand that we need unique individuals here. Maybe not unique that they are different, but unique that they have a set of skills and a desire to be here, and that's going to be increasingly more so in the future.

Aware of the increasing prevalence of child exploitation and the rapidly advancing technology, some participants discussed the fact that local policing agencies will have to take on more of the child exploitation investigations themselves, using the ICE team in a more consultative fashion. This will require policing organizations to select recruits coming in to the policing field who are more technically knowledgeable.

> Child exploitation issues are going to be a call for service and it's going to be like your domestic violence. It's going to be like your break and enter. And then you are going to have to have the skills that are going to be associated to that call for service.

Category 4d: Impact of the lack of resources on team members. The absence of sufficient people, and people with the right set of skills places additional pressures, stress and burdens on team members. Several of the participants contributing incidents in this category indicated that not being adequately resourced has led to significant feelings of pressure. Participants indicated they take on more than they should, because there are no others to do some of the urgent jobs. This causes them to fall further behind in their own work. Additionally, failing to replace all who have left has added to that stress.

> We need more people, there's no two ways about it. We've lost a lot more people, and of course, the distrust of everyone goes up. I don't know how many fold when you have to deal with so many files and so few people.

Due to insufficient resourcing, the ICE team must pull in members from other units to assist them in their investigations on a regular basis.

> We offer assistance to other agencies as well. There was one day when they had to take [a member from a different team] and one of the ICE members, because there was not enough ICE members to go to assist with a search warrant.

Morale has been affected by the lack of people resources. Keeping up with the continually advancing technology requires training. Skill development has been impacted as team members are not always releasable for this training due to operational needs. Training of other law enforcement and the community are also critical pieces of the job that are left to fall by the wayside due to insufficient resources.

> You need to train law enforcement and because ICE is kind of the in-thing, the trend, we want to take advantage of it and get out there. We get calls all the time from people, the community, to speak, and we don't. We don't do community groups because you just can't. You could do it full time, everyday.

The inability to train is felt by participants for a number of reasons. Training law enforcement would allow detachments or police agencies to take the lead in more of their own ICE investigations. Training community members about the dangers of the internet may directly result in preventing children from becoming victimized.

Category 5: Barriers Experienced in Psychological Interventions (33 incidents, 12 participants)

This category contains incidents related to barriers experienced in psychological interventions that have been offered or are available to team members. This category has been divided into three subcategories. They are: (a) Inoculation Session, (b) Identifying Needs and Blocks/Barriers to Accessing Psychological Assistance, and (c) Mandatory Annual Psychological Assessment.

Category 5a: Inoculation session. Incidents in this category related to hindering aspects of the inoculation session. Several of the participants identified a hindering aspect to be the lack of information they were given about the intervention, prior to attending.

> I don't think anybody knew what this inoculation and diffusion session was about. They sent an e-mail out saying they want to have a meeting, inoculation and diffusion. I had no idea what it was about. Just take the time and give people a proper heads-up, you know?

As several were not aware of what the inoculation session was to entail, some participants felt disappointed as their expectations for the session were not met.

> I guess I was expecting that they would help us, not that we would be the ones put in a position of giving all this stuff. But that they would be giving us something in terms of informing us about the kinds of feelings that we may experience, and may be having. That would have been very useful, because some of the people who are feeling some really

> uncomfortable things, embarrassing things, may have felt reassured to know that, okay, this is one of the things that you might feel. Like they are saying “it’s possible that you might have some sexual dysfunction.” Oh, okay. You know, whoa.

Several of the participants also found that the size of the group was too large, and the mix of different teams created an environment that did not feel safe.

> People are less likely to talk about their true feelings if they’re with people that they don’t really know, or don’t really trust. There were a few of the people in there that I don’t trust. So it was very uncomfortable.

Another participant expressed a similar concern, but extended the concern to the two psychologists that were present: “But with the two that I considered outsiders, the two psychologists who we had never seen before and never met before, again, there’s no way that anybody was going to say anything personal with strangers like that.” In addition, one participant commented that learning one of the psychologists worked with sex offenders immediately turned him off. “If they work with victims, maybe I could feel comfortable in discussing things with them, but they work with offenders – I’m sorry, the door shuts right there.”

Some of the participants also reported that the absence of safety forced them to be guarded in what they revealed, which was exhausting for them. “We were actually more exhausted from being guarded than we were from actually sharing.” Not feeling safe in the group also prevented some participants from being completely open about the symptoms and reactions they were experiencing.

> There were no uncomfortable things mentioned, like “I drink too much,”

> I have sexual dysfunction," "I feel guilty I get aroused at looking at some of these pictures." Those are the kinds of things that would be very real to our group of people for sure. Some of that's going on, but nobody mentioned that uncomfortable stuff. And they're not going to. Not in that environment. Not with all those people. It just isn't safe.

And finally in relation to the inoculation session, some of the participants expressed anger that images were shown to them without any prior warning. They commented that they felt unprepared and almost assaulted by the images they were shown. Some did not see the value in showing the images. "I don't think it was of any value, to be exposed to the images. I'm already exposed to that. I don't need to see that kind of stuff anymore."

Category 5b: Identifying needs and blocks/barriers to accessing psychological assistance. For participants contributing to this category, one issue that hindered accessing psychological assistance included a reluctance to talk for fear of repercussions such as a breach of confidentiality.

> They may have a problem that's really bothering them that they're afraid to talk about, no matter how much their confidentiality is guaranteed. I think there's just a general paranoia that they're worried that it's going to go on their personal file. I think there are probably many that have thought about going to see one that haven't, for that reason, and would just rather work it out.

Some of the participants commented on how important it is to have a feeling of safety and trust, and the difficulties individuals face if they do not access help when they need it. Although the team members look out for each other, they are not always able to catch things in time.

> Unfortunately, there’s been times where I’ve not seen that – the person’s hidden it. You know. “Oh how you doing?” “Oh, fine, fine,” and all of this. And all of a sudden, there’s been a couple of people that all of a sudden, they’re right on the brink, they don’t really show up, but then there’s one little final thing happens, and they emotionally collapse.

Not having a consistent source of professional support and the difficulties in finding the right psychologist were also identified as hindering. As safety and trust is so critical, one participant talked about the difficulties faced when attempting to find one.

> Who are they? How do you select one? You want an experienced psychologist who has worked with people – they know what our work is like. They need to know strategies that work dealing with this type of work. You also want to know a little about them. What kind of person are they? Do they have kids? Do you have similar interests? Do you have anything in common? Just as a way to help make the decision.

Category 5c: Mandatory annual psychological assessment. Participants are required by policy to attend annual psychological assessments. Discomfort opening up to unknown professionals was raised as a hindering factor by participants in this category.

> If I was going for regular visits, then you are more inclined to open up, but then I think, “This is a one time deal. I’m not going to get all emotional just for one session.” It’s not worth the energy.

Some participants described the annual assessment as a very good idea, except that people do not go. “They say you have to go every six months, but no one enforces that. Nobody ever checks the diary date.” Another participant said, “annual psych assessments, it would be great, but I've never had one."

Category 6: Organizational Factors (excluding lack of resources) (32 incidents, 12 participants)

This category specifically deals with incidents related to the policing organization. Contained within this category are things the organization fails to provide to members that would enhance their ability to perform optimally. This category has been divided into four subcategories: (a) Lack of Directional Parameters in the Unit, (b) Office Environment, (c) Lack of Training, and (d) Lack of Understanding of ICE Team Needs by Policing Organization.

Category 6a: Lack of directional parameters in the unit. Some of the participants found a lack of directional parameters hindered their coping with the work.

> It's one of our biggest downfalls is that we are all over the map. You can be tied to the unit all you want, but you know, on the part of a government organization like this, you're never really tied to one thing. And that makes things suffer in the long run, I think, the files themselves.

Participants contributing to this category found that those new to the unit were not receiving timely guidance or necessary direction. One participant described their experience.

> When I first started here it almost seemed like a fish out of water. There seemed to be little direction. You start working here and right away you're given files, and from people who I think have forgotten what it was to be new in a unit, and not really know. You know how to do police work, but kind of the office rules and that sort of thing.

In addition to direction and guidance, some of the participants perceived that the absence of enforced policy in several areas was hindering. One of the areas of need specifically related to time limits for working on the unit. “I think those time limits are good, they should be in place. A lot of times we members think we are coping. We have sort of certain coping mechanisms but it is not helping working here ongoing.” Some of the participants stated that enforcing the policy on time limits for viewing child sexual abuse images was critical. “We need very strict policies on viewing child pornography. They are kind of there already – but not enforced. No one should be able to deviate from them, unless you get special permission from the boss.”

Category 6b: Office environment. Most participant comments in this category related to inadequate office space in relation to privacy, layout, and physical space. The ICE team currently inhabits a space within the BSG office. Several of the team members work in relatively small cubicles, located in an open area. The cubicle design hinders unit members in that there is no privacy, and the risk of exposing others to graphic material is higher. The rows are so close together it is possible to sit at the desk of one team member and be able to clearly read words on the computer monitor of the member sitting in the next row. Participants reported that it is possible to hear at least four people on the phone at any one moment in time. They are frequently told to keep the noise down as others are working, which hinders team discussion and frequently needed laughter. In addition, because the panels of the cubicles give the illusion of privacy, there are times when protected information is overheard by others walking past or standing nearby.

> The ideal thing would be to have a complete separate office for the ICE unit. We have chances to talk about our investigations pretty freely and it’s protected “B.” So, I’m sure that there’s many times when we’re saying things that shouldn’t be heard, that they’re being heard. I can’t be walking

> around five foot walls, to see who’s on the other side before I talk.

Other participants commented on the noise levels in the office being hindering to their work. One of the participants described the environment: “Here, you’ve got so many people around you working, and going by, and phones ringing, and stuff like that, it takes away your concentration.”

In relation to space, the cubicles are just not suitable to meet their needs, adding to the hindering nature of the office environment.

> The desk I’m at right now, I’ve gone from a huge desk, to one half the size. I’ve got a work station that big now. Because there is not enough room, I’m having to work away from my phone. If somebody phones I’m away from the phone, or I’ve got to find a table or a meeting room.

And finally, according to one participant, “The office environment is physically ugly and cluttered and it’s just not nice. It’s just grey and dismal. You don’t even know if it is night or day or if the sky has fallen outside. I don’t like that.”

Some of the participants also commented on the viewing room. It too is relatively small and completely windowless. According to one participant, “The room is very tiny because you don’t have the space. There’s no air in there, so you have to come out to keep breathing.”

Category 6c: Lack of training. Participants contributing to this category indicated that there is too little training, offered too late. Training in itself is seen by participants as extremely helpful; however, sending team members away for training can cause even more hardship for the unit. When staff are away on a course, no action is taken on any incoming file, unless it is an emergency. Additionally, training often occurs with little notice, placing more strain on the unit.

> Sometimes training can also be a hindrance, in a sense, that it's bad timing for courses. And, you're just trying to get so much done, and some of the courses come up at the last minute. There's a seat that's become available, do you want to take it? And of course, you very much do want to be on the course, and you want the training. However, you kind of already had a mental "to do" list for the next week, now you're going to have to re-juggle, re-evaluate everything to get it all done to go on the course.

Category 6d: Lack of understanding of ICE team needs by policing organization. For the participants contributing to this category, the policing universe did not seem to understand the seriousness of child exploitation or the work of the ICE team. Of note, participants contributing to this category made a strong distinction between their direct supervisors, who are extremely knowledgeable and supportive, and those in the larger, overall management structure outside of BSG. This results in an overarching sense that there is no support for the unit and for what they are trying to achieve. This is felt directly when they see resources placed in other units instead of their own: "Stolen autos are a great concern, especially if you have a car that's stolen. There's actually more people assigned to stolen auto investigations than there are to child exploitation."

For some of the participants who see the faces and hear the cries of the young victims, that logic is impossible to understand. "Staffing does not see this as a priority. That to me is mind blowing. So it's not just that we are working against the legal system, but within the RCMP they are not hearing at all."

In addition to the insufficient numbers of investigators on the ICE team, an inability to provide appropriate and timely training is also experienced by the team as reflecting a lack of understanding of child exploitation and ICE by the policing organization.

> ICE is obviously very computer, very tech heavy and to get our people up to snuff on training it's very expensive and they don't, management doesn't, they just don't get it. They have no concept of what's involved in an ICE file. So that's a hindrance.

The lack of resources also hinders ICE members' ability to maintain familiarity with current trends and technologies, and continuing to forge the international relationships required to work effectively. "How do we get out of this office and go to conferences and go to meetings and represent British Columbia? Because we don't have time, we don't have resources, we can't do that." There is a strong sense that the unit is suffering because of the lack of understanding.

Category 7: Workload (24 incidents, 9 participants)

Incidents in this category related to the impact of the workload on ICE team members. This category is divided into two subcategories: (a) Impact of Workload on the Individual, and (b) Outstanding Files – Pressure and Concern for the Victims.

Category 7a: Impact of workload on individual. Participants contributing to this category discussed the hindering aspects the workload has had on them personally.

One of the most significant issues seem related to the fact that, in order to cope with the amount of work, team members do not take their breaks, despite their recognition that they should. Coffee breaks are missed, lunch is eaten at desks, and even bathroom breaks are delayed. "I'm one of those people, I can sit there for five hours straight, and I haven't left the computer, even to go to the bathroom. Because you have so much you need to get done."

A few of the participants were involved in doing presentations. According to these participants, preparation for the presentations was routinely done at home on their own time. "I spend a lot of time preparing presentations. I normally do them at home at night." Participants who were supervisors talked about taking team member annual assessments home, in order to have the time to complete them properly.

The pressure to keep up with the workload is felt at all levels. According to participants, team members are responsible for more files than they should be, and they are viewing more than they should be. Because of the number of files that continue to come in to the unit on a regular basis, the Team Leader is spending much time investigating, instead of managing the team, and that is hindering to the entire unit. "I can't concentrate or focus on managing the team. I'm too busy investigating, which is not my role. So I'm wearing too many hats."

Category 7b: Outstanding files – pressure and concern for the victims. In addition to the actual number of files that are outstanding, investigators are very much aware of the faces behind these files and the serious nature of these crimes. One participant described the effects of this awareness: "Frustration knowing that nobody's working on them, if you're not acting on this right away, you're worried, what's the impact on the victim? That's tough. You're always looking at that, you're constantly worrying about it." Another participant reports a similar experience:

> I can quite honestly say that the one bad thing is when you've got a file in your head that just sits there, that you know has all these images, and you have no idea what's going to happen with the file. That [outstanding] file for one of these (ICE) bothered me more than most files, just because it

> seems like the work is so overburdening or overpowering, and an inability to conquer it for whatever reason that caused stress. There’s a fear that the person has had a year and a half of - who knows what he is doing at home and on the internet, the file has gone unlooked at.

Category 8: Technology (16 incidents, 4 participants)

Incidents in this category related to the problems posed by the technical nature of investigations and the continuous evolution of technology. Several of the participants mentioned the added degree of difficulty internet investigations have. “With a computer, you don’t know where your pedophile is.” The playing field has moved and shifted, “ICE is on the internet. They have no boundaries, it’s worldwide, and sometimes you look at those pictures and think, I will never find this child, and I will never find this guy.”

Participants spoke about their lack of in-depth knowledge of computers, and how difficult that makes their investigations.

> Here, you’ve basically a suspect – a victim who may be known or unknown, and you’ve got a whole bunch of computer stuff. And I will be the first to admit, I am not that computer-savvy, and the file I’m working on right now, the big one, there’s a guy who’s been for years of training on computers for the government, very sophisticated. He has survived several investigations, because he’s managed to have ways of using other people’s computers. Erasing it from his computers, hiding the stuff somehow – and that is the biggest thing right there.

Most ICE investigations require evidence that is obtained from computers or other digital storage devices, which in turn requires adequate technical support. This need for specialized expertise is only going to continue to grow. Thinking of the not too distant future, several of the participants expressed concerned about what that will mean for future investigations. One technologically adept participant explained:

> The computer world is going to hinder us in how we do things in the future. Its technology is moving to the point where you will be running operating systems that have the ability to encrypt on the fly. The availability of networks that are coming on and cell phones that are going to be a mobile device that's going to have the capabilities of downloading as fast as your PC, within a short period of time, within a wide geographical region. Vancouver is very shortly going to be a completely wireless network. Where am I going to get a warrant issued for what? Where? So it's going to become more challenging dealing with those types of issues.

The law in this area is still very new, which continues to be a hindrance according to some of the participants. "We're still learning as we go, so we have made many mistakes, we have lost a couple of files in court." According to another participant, the impact technology has had on the ICE team and on policing in general has been rapid and significant.

> Accessibility has changed everything. The internet has moved and shifted. Policing and access of information and sharing information worldwide is now fundamentally changing policing in general, and will continue into the future. There's no stopping it.

Category 9: Challenges Posed by Newness of Unit (10 incidents, 4 participants)

According to some participants, the newness of the unit brings with it its own set of challenges, which can also be quite hindering. The amount of information to learn is staggering, the case law is new, the entire process is new. Team members often require a great deal of guidance and support, which is not always possible with the current resourcing situation. The impact of working with all of the newness was described by one participant:

> It's just these files can appear overwhelming at times because they are new to a lot of people. They seem like they're overburdening because they involve the internet and all these factors that a lot of us are not really comfortable with. And so without the support – it makes it more stressful to deal with. Even if your role is minor, you get concerned.

As a result of the newness, more guidance is required province-wide, as there is still little experience in the field. "I spend a significant amount of time on the phone answering requests for assistance from GD members because it is so new." New members in the unit generally require a lot of training as everybody coming in to the unit is new to the work. For many, formal training is not immediately available, which places greater pressure on the more experienced unit members and Team Leader to provide on the job training. For the newcomers, the learning curve is steep and initiative important.

> If you don't know something, you have to self-educate yourself. You come here; you have to start reading up on the case law for that specific act. Those type of crimes, you may not have dealt with them a lot in the Criminal Code, so there's another facet you have to read up on.

The final hindrance identified by some of the participants in the category of newness of the unit was the lack of guidelines. As much of this work has never been done before, there are no specific models and directions to follow.

> Being a new unit with new laws, no mandates, no policies, nothing, we kind of flew by the seat of our pants literally. Kind of exciting, but mostly hindrance because you had nobody to go to to ask advice, and no policy to rely on.

Category 10: Government Policies/ International Challenges (9 incidents, 4 participants)

Challenges with lack of government support and international law were described as hindrances by participants contributing to this category. There was a perception from some of the participants that the government did not recognize the seriousness and implications of child exploitation. This belief is supported by the lack of funding received for sufficient resources in the unit. According to one participant, “We were promised 54 bodies when we first started up. We are not getting the resources we need. I feel frustrated, angry, disappointed and disbelief. Where is the humanity? I feel a loss of faith. How can you bury your head?”

The lack of governmental support was clearly hindering to many of the participants. From another, “You just think, “What are they thinking? Why are they thinking that way? Are insurance companies screaming more and more about stolen cars, do we need our victims to come and scream at the politicians and the officials?”

According to some of the participants, there are many ways the government could step in to help investigators, such as assisting in the development of information sharing policies with telecommunications companies.

> There’s always ways to deal with things, but it’s working out how that’s going to happen and those issues that are going to take more than our section. There is going to have to be at some point, some political will that has to be put in place or that has to shift to change how fundamentally

> telecommunication companies deal with us related to certain issues and to come up with some form of sharing of information related to some of this information.

Participants referred to the differences in laws and requirements of other countries as international challenges. International challenges were identified as another hindering aspect of ICE work.

> You also feel that the government and the laws aren't helping you. Why can't they just shut these sites down? Why can't you go to Russia and say, "Look what you are producing?" Or China or any of those other places that this is just a multi-million dollar deal and they just keep going.

In relation to prosecuting offenders who commit offences in other jurisdictions, one participant explained the international challenges involved:

> We have to stick to the BC offences and the BC courts. However, we can have BC people or pedophiles go out and offend in other countries, and then come back here. And there again, you have to find out, number one, if it's illegal in that country; if it is, are they willing to let us prosecute in Canada where the offence took place in another country. And that in itself takes time, quite a bit of time.

Participants also expressed a need for all levels to get involved: "Dealing with the international aspects of it and the lines of internationals being blurred, are gone completely. It's throwing policing and international security and everything else into a complete shift, change, flux."

Category 11: Working on Lengthy File (over one year) (9 incidents, 6 participants)

Incidents in this category related to the impact of working on a long-term file.

Some participants contributing to this category described having more difficulty caring for such an extended period of time, and felt isolated and left out of other unit activities. Some participants expressed frustration at devoting so much time to one offender.

> And yes, my file is getting very hard to come back to after two years. My care factor is down there, but you've still got to do it, you've still got to follow through. It's like I say, I'm sick of spending so much time dealing with this guy, but you know, he's just a brat, he doesn't deserve this much attention, but unfortunately, that's what I've got to do.

Another participant expressed frustration at not being able to pitch in and help out with other investigations coming in to the unit. "Hearing other members talking or knowing about the incoming files, knowing that I can't offer my assistance or take some of those files and run with them, because I am overloaded with the big file I have."

Some of the participants working on long-term files felt the investigation tended to take on a more personal meaning because of the amount of time spent on the one investigation. Viewing images of the same victims over a large chunk of time in a wide array of situations, including many normal situations such as at birthday parties and during Christmas, made it much more difficult for some team members to remain objective.

> There are definitely one or two that stick with you. But usually those are the long-term projects where you're seeing the same over and over. Whereas if you're just doing a quick scan of multiple, multiple images, it's not usually the same child. So you can focus more on what's happening in the background rather than the child. Because then it becomes personal.

> Because now, you're getting to see this child in a social, personal setting. And in some cases, you're hearing their voice, and you're hearing the interactions. So when you have the auditory and the visual going on at the same time, you're human, you're going to start relating.

Category 12: Lack of Societal Understanding of the Seriousness of ICE (7 incidents, 3 participants)

This category contains incidents from participants related to the perceived lack of awareness of child exploitation by society, the unwillingness of society to accept the scale of the problem, and the "head in the sand" mentality of our society.

Participants contributing to this category believed this lack of awareness hindered coping with the work, because societal awareness and attitudes impact everything that is done on every level, including protecting children and prosecuting cases. Participants expressed frustration that society is not as aware as they should be.

> I know there's some people that say, "Well, is he making child pornography?" "No, he's just viewing it." "Well, what's really the crime there?" You know? You try to say to them, some child, somewhere, had to be victimized to have these photos taken so this guy here can enjoy that. So you look at that and you just wonder, you look at society and wonder why people think the way they do, and why they're not as super-concerned about it, and you get people that really could care less, as long as it doesn't affect them. I guess that kind of makes the job difficult.

Another perspective was expressed by a different participant:

> The biggest frustration is the lack of consciousness – or awareness – of

> society as a whole. The good people understand this, but I guess more the legal system. You'll look at this, and you look at this and that, you look at the children, and other people just say, "Oh, it's child porn." Like the ostrich with the head in the sand type of attitude of society.

Participants have the opportunity to experience first hand the decision-making within the courts. Questioning how society could permit certain types of court decisions to remain unchallenged was a common theme with several of the participants.

> It just seems unfortunate in court, lawyers will make deals outside of court, and argue this and that, that you know cases shouldn't go ahead, and then it just seems like it's accepted, and it's like, "Where's the parties in society?"

In addition to the frustration with society in general, participants expressed frustration with members of society who have children, and yet remain uninformed.

> Canadians have been so under-informed with things in general over the years, cushioned or whatever you want to call it, that people, lawmakers, feel they couldn't handle it. And maybe there's some people that wouldn't want to handle it. They want to go through life not knowing about this, but unfortunately there's a lot of people like that that have children.

Another participant also expressed that societal lack of knowledge about child exploitation is hindering in that it puts children at risk out of ignorance.

> They're putting their children at risk every day on the internet and leaving their children with men and boys they don't know or they don't – not that they don't know. It's not that they don't know. They don't

know about it.

Summary

As outlined in the preceding chapter, participants provided a great deal of extremely valuable information on what they found helped and hindered coping with ICE work. From the 14 interviews, 795 incidents were identified. These incidents were analyzed for themes and patterns, and using inductive reasoning, resulted in the placement of 446 incidents into 12 helpful categories and 40 helpful subcategories; and 349 incidents into 12 hindering categories and 35 hindering subcategories.

Much of the results correspond with literature on police, secondary traumatic stress and coping. Some unique findings relating specifically to the ICE team were identified through this study. The following chapter will address literature cross-validation and offer a synthesis and discussion of these results.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the many findings that emerged from analyzing the results of interview with 14 participants working on the British Columbia ICE team are examined in relation to relevant existing literature. Often referred to as *theoretical validation* or *cross validation*, this process allows concepts that emerged from the study to be checked against the literature base. Following a brief discussion of the cross validation of the data, the many unique findings that emerged in this study will be highlighted. The implications of these findings for the RCMP and for the field of Counselling Psychology will then be described. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study, and the implications for future research in this area.

Literature Cross-Validation and Theoretical Validity

Most patterns and themes identified in this study resonated with current literature on secondary traumatic stress, policing, and coping. In an effort to provide clarity, the following areas will be addressed in the cross-validation of the literature: organizational support, organizational acknowledgement of secondary traumatic stress, psychological support, preparation for ICE work, training, sense of control, limiting exposure and rotating job functions, viewing and exposure to the realities of child exploitation, emotional distancing or dissociation and mitigating secondary traumatic stress, personal meaning and satisfaction as a mitigating factor, humour, self care strategies, and coping. For ease of reference, the relevant category number will be identified whenever a specific result is mentioned. Next to the category number, a “+” will indicate if it was from a helpful category, and a “-” will indicate it was from a hindering category.

Organizational Support

Current literature highlights the importance of organizational support as a mitigating factor in the development of secondary traumatic stress (Brown et al., 1999; Clarkson, 2006; Collins & Long, 2003; Follette et al., 1994; Hallett, 1996; Karlsson & Christianson, 2003; Nelson-Gardell, 2003; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995; Rasmussen, 2005; Salston & Figley, 2003; Sewell, 1994; Sexton, 1999; Stephens & Long, 1999; Violanti, 1999).

Because participants in this study work in a small unit within the larger RCMP structure, several themes revolved around the perception of organizational support. Themes relating to the availability of adequate resources, namely staffing (4-), workload (7-), the availability (and lack) of training (9a+, 6c-), the quality of ongoing supervision, and support they receive from their Supervisors and peers were identified as factors that helped or hindered their abilities to cope with the work (4+, 10+).

Organizational Acknowledgement of Secondary Traumatic Stress

Organizational acknowledgement of secondary traumatic stress and the degree of importance placed on psychological support has also been identified as important in mitigating secondary traumatic stress (Burke, 1998; Clarkson, 2006; Collins & Long, 2003; Dane, 2000; Haish & Meyers, 2004; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Leonard & Alison, 1999; Ortlepp & Friedman, 2002). Participants in this study identified numerous helpful and hindering incidents that related to their perceptions of the psychological support they received (2+, 5-). Overall, accessing support was normalized and encouraged within the team (2+, 4b+, 10b+). The type of interventions available and frequency of access was identified as having both helpful and hindering components by participants in this study (2+, 5-).

Psychological Support

The availability of peer support networks, Member or Employee Assistance programs, and professional psychological support (including private therapists familiar with the policing culture and the availability of peer diffusions and Critical Incident Stress Debriefings) have also been noted to be mitigating factors in the literature (Clarkson, 2006; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Morley, 2003; Sewell, 1994; Sheehan et al., 2004; Van Patten & Burke, 2001). Participants in this study provided a number of examples of the helpful factors associated with working in a strong, supportive team (4+). The incidents contained in categories of Psychological Support identified both helpful and hindering aspects (2+, 5-). The importance of police officers feeling comfortable accessing psychologists has been stressed in the literature (Cross & Ashley, 2004; Morley, 2003). Significant factors identified as helpful by several participants included having a relationship with a therapist, and having access to therapists familiar with the policing culture and with the work and impact specific to ICE (2c+). Not having a pre-existing relationship or access to psychologists who were knowledgeable about policing culture was identified as hindering by some of the participants (5-).

Preparation for ICE Work

Additional issues identified by participants included how the organization prepared unit members for the type of work they must do. An inoculation process may better prepare the investigators for they type of work they will be exposed to (Clarkson, 2006; Cross & Ashley, 2004; Hallett, 1996; Sewell, 1994). Experiences with the inoculation session were mixed. The majority of the participants who attended the session found it to be extremely beneficial, although several made suggestions on how to improve the implementation of this intervention for future sessions. Suggestions included, presenting to smaller teams who naturally trusted each other to increase the feeling of safety; and having improved communication about the concept of the session, to allow members to prepare ahead of time for viewing images.

Sheehan et al. (2004) found that providing investigators with accurate expectations prior to being immersed in the work can assist them to cope more effectively, as it aids in the development of protective psychological barriers. In this study, participants discussed the importance of showing images to candidates as part of a pre-screening process (12b+). They also stressed the importance of gradually exposing new members to images (1a+) and of being mentally prepared themselves prior to viewing graphic images (1b+).

Training

The need for training in the area of technology, child sexual exploitation investigations, stress management, secondary traumatic stress, and helpful coping resources for both team members and their families were identified as helpful by participants (2d+, 7+, 6c-, 8-).

Sense of Control

A sense of control over the work was seen as an important factor in mitigating secondary traumatic stress (Sheehan et al., 2004; Stinchcomb, 2004; Violanti, 1999). Some of the participants discussed the issue of control. Several participants indicated they did not feel they had much control at work given the resource situation, the nature of the work, and the response by the criminal justice system, all factors identified by participants as hindering (2-, 3-, 4-, 6-, 7-).

Rotating Job Functions

Rotating job functions so that individuals are exposed to a variety of tasks and given respite from graphic and painful images, victims, and their families has been identified as helpful in the literature (Clarkson, 2006; Keats, 2005; Sewell, 1994). Several participants in this study found that placing a limit on viewing or deliberately rotating job function to give team members a break was an effective way to help them cope with the work (1+, 3+). Other themes that emerged in this research and were supported in the literature included the availability of equipment and other resources (9+, 4-), and the perceived support from the policing organization (6d-), the Criminal Justice System (2-) and society as a whole (12-).

Areas Identified in the Literature but Not Addressed by This Study

Age was determined to be a variable in the development of secondary traumatic stress in a study of therapists working with victims of sexual assault (Ghahramanlou & Brodbeck, 2000); as was length of time providing treatment (Creamer, 2005; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995; Steed & Bicknell, 2001); and amount of exposure to traumatized clients (Kassam-Adams, 1995; Schauben & Frazier, 1995). Although potentially relevant to this group of participants, these factors were outside of the scope of this particular study. In addition, the exploratory, qualitative design precludes any informal extrapolation on this topic. Participants did identify that having a large amount of viewing, viewing more intense evidence, or not being able to take breaks during viewing was extremely hindering (2-, 3-, 11-).

Viewing/Exposure to the Realities of Child Exploitation

One of the most difficult aspects of this work is the requirement for unit members to view graphic images of child sexual abuse and torture. Findings from a study on vicarious witnessing in European concentration camps identified several coping mechanisms that were reflected in this study. As their horror over what they were witnessing grew, the participants in Keats' (2005) study felt a strong need to become active informers, to tell others what they had witnessed. In a similar vein, some participants in this study expressed a desire to provide more education about ICE to the policing organization and the community (4d-). Several talked about the frustration they experienced not being able to respond to all of the requests, knowing that educating others on child exploitation and safe internet use would help keep children safe. Some participants, motivated by the knowledge they carry about ICE, experienced a compelling need to offer advice and suggestions to friends, family and other parents. This advice was not always welcomed (1g-).

Participants also expressed frustration with the lack of knowledge about child exploitation on the part of the criminal justice system (2-), the police organization (6d-), and society in general (12-), and a strong desire to see those parties become educated as they might then do more to put a stop to what is happening.

In addition to the compelling need to inform others, Keats (2005) wrote of the emotional, physical, cognitive, social and spiritual impact that came out of observing, listening, imagining and reporting what was witnessed. Participants in this study described similar impact in their work (1-). Keats also described how her participants placed great importance in the group as a touchstone, to allow them to speak about their experiences. Participants from this study repeatedly emphasized the importance of talking with peers, peer support and social activities as extremely helpful in coping with the work (4+, 6+). Withdrawing or distancing was an important means of coping when participants had reached "witnessing saturation points" in Keats' study. Participants in this study also emphasized the importance of being self aware, of knowing their limits and of taking breaks during the process of viewing (1+). They discussed the importance of placing a limit on viewing (3d+) and recognizing the long term boundaries associated with this work. Knowing when to walk away and leave the unit permanently to move on to other things was seen as very difficult, but extremely helpful to coping in this environment (3e+).

Finally, Keats' (2005) participants described the accumulated knowledge that built within subjects with each additional concentration camp they visited. As a result of this stored knowledge, stories became more believable, familiar and horrible. Some participants in this study described a similar response. One participant described the process of imagining what could be happening to the victim prior to or after a photograph was taken, when viewing still images. Seeing video and hearing audio of children crying, screaming or pleading made it possible for participants to look at still pictures and bring the stored knowledge they had accumulated over the course of their time on the ICE unit to another image, thereby enhancing the impact (3-). One participant described being more afraid of having her child abducted as she was now more aware of how her child could be treated by an abductor (1h-). Several participants described the impact of being exposed to the reality – the scope and horror of child exploitation and how that impacts them as they carry that knowledge through every aspect of their lives (1a-).

Emotional Distancing/Dissociation/ Mitigating Secondary Traumatic Stress

The existing literature within policing identifies a strong link between empathically engaging with victims of sexual assault, and developing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress (Brown, 1999; Clarkson, 2006; Evans et al., 1993; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Pogrebin & Poole, 1991; Sewell, 2004). Salston and Figley (2003) found the ability to create distance between the worker and the work, both physically and mentally, to be important variables in preventing secondary traumatic stress. Research in policing has identified the benefits to investigators who are able to disengage from their work, in an effort to maintain safe emotional distances from the reality of what they are seeing and hearing (Evans et al., 1993; Hallett, 1996; Pogrebin & Poole, 1991; Sewell, 1994; Violanti, 1999, Violanti & Gehrke, 2004). Clarkson (2006) found the combination of empathic engagement and working with very young victims of sexual assault placed the investigator at the highest risk of developing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. Holmberg (2004) found highest stress rates among detectives working with child homicide or sexual abuse cases. His study identified that exposure to narratives and a feeling of empathy led to an increased risk of developing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. Participants in the present study repeatedly mentioned the importance of creating distance between themselves and the victims. The ability to compartmentalize feelings or to dissociate while viewing was described as critical to their mental well-being (1c+). Taking care not to personalize or identify with a child, taking care not to feel a connection with the victim (or look at their eyes) were approaches found to be extremely helpful in coping with the work (1e+, 3-). Participants described the need to “leave work at work”, and to engage in distracting activities or activities that offered a sense of escape – all efforts to create and maintain distance between the worker and work (3+, 1f-).

Many of the participants discussed the use of mental disengagement as a coping mechanism. This is a very powerful way for them to cope with viewing graphic images in the moment. Although a helpful strategy at the time, the use of dissociation during the course of viewing traumatic material may create a greater risk for the eventual development of posttraumatic stress disorder (Bryant et al, 2001; Hallett, 1996; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Frequent use of dissociation to block emotions may also result in the use of this coping mechanism during even minor stressors outside of the working environment (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1989).

Personal Meaning/Satisfaction as a Mitigating Factor

According to Salston and Figley (2003), the two most important components to preventing compassion fatigue are: (a) having a sense of satisfaction from working with traumatized individuals, and (b) the ability (or competence) to create physical and mental distance between the workers and the work. Personal meaning (Hope, 2006; Stamm, 2005) and a sense of personal satisfaction (Hart et al., 1995, Stamm, 2005) have also been found to act as a buffer against the development of secondary traumatic stress. Personal meaning has also been found to assist RCMP officers remain engaged with their work (Morley, 2003). Similarly, participants in this study identified that having a sense of meaning, or a feeling that they are making a difference, helped them to cope with ICE work (5+).

Humour

Police officers routinely use humour as a coping mechanism (Clarkson, 2006; Cross & Ashley, 2004; Follette et al., 1994; Haish & Meyers, 2004; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Sewell, 1994). Many of the participants in this study described humour to be an extremely effective method of releasing strong emotions and creating distance between themselves and the reality of the situations they are exposed to (11+). They reported that using humour helped them feel good, relieved stress, and removed the toxicity from the moment. Humour was used to pull a partner out of an emotional place when viewing, and helped participants regain a sense of control (11+).

Self-Care Strategies

Healthy self-care strategies have long been associated with coping and wellbeing, and have been recognized as effective ways of mitigating secondary traumatic stress (Beaton & Murphy, 1995; Bober, 2006; Burke, 1998; Clarkson, 2006; Cross & Ashley, 2004; Folkman et al., 1986; Haish & Meyers, 2004; Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Hope, 2006; Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996; Violanti, 1992). Participants in this study identified a number of self-care strategies that were helpful in coping with their work. These included being in supportive and committed relationships, accessing family support, interacting socially with others outside the unit, eating properly, exercising regularly, spirituality, and engaging in extra-curricular activities such as sports or other hobbies and/or volunteer experiences (3+, 4+).

Gender

In contrast to existing literature (Brown, 1999; Kassam-Adams, 1995), participants did not specifically identify gender as a factor in coping. It is of interest to note that two female participants in this study did mentioned they were more emotional when they were viewing during particular points in their menstrual cycle, and reported that being female meant they had additional family and home responsibilities which added to their stress and therefore hindered coping (1b-, 3-).

Previous Maltreatment History

A topic of debate within the literature is the influence a past history of maltreatment has on coping (Follette et al., 1994; Hallett, 1996; Kassam-Adams, 1995; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995). Participants did not discuss previous maltreatment history during the interviews in this study. It is unclear if this was because none of the participants had a history of maltreatment, because they did not believe their maltreatment histories affected their work, or because they were uncomfortable sharing these experiences with the interviewer.

Having Children of Similar Age to Victims

A couple of participants mentioned that having children of similar ages to victims in images they were viewing hindered their ability to cope with their work. They stated it was more difficult to remain completely objective, as they were more likely to personalize (3-). Having children was also a factor in making them more paranoid about the safety of their children (1j-) (Brown et al., 1999; Hallett, 1996).

Coping

A comparison of the literature with the results identified that participants are utilizing a number of extremely adaptive coping mechanisms (Carver et al. 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). According to Carver et al. (1989), adaptive coping takes the form of planning, seeking instrumental social support, seeking emotional support; and positive reinterpretation of events. Many participants in this study were actively using these adaptive coping strategies on a regular basis (3+, 4+). Maladaptive coping mechanisms included isolation, withdrawal, and expressing anger and frustration toward others (1b-). Although the use of drugs and alcohol and other maladaptive strategies may also be strategies employed by police officers (Hallett, 1996; Violanti, 1999), they were not mentioned by participants during their interviews.

Unique Findings

There were a number of new and interesting findings that emerged from this study, that go beyond the existing literature on this topic. In order to provide a clear framework for this new information, they have been divided into two main themes. They relate to (a) the intensity of ICE work (including viewing, impact, personal strategies, team, sense of responsibility, supervision, and psychological support); and (b) the impact of the reality of child exploitation (including the frustrations experienced by participants as an awareness of the scope of the problem has not yet permeated the layers of society, the CJS, and the policing organization.

The Intensity of ICE Work

Most serious crime investigators are exposed to many horrific scenes, images and narratives over the course of their careers. Investigators are routinely called to respond after a violent crime has been committed, their job beginning after the crime has occurred. These investigators work long hours under often very intense and difficult circumstances to solve these crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. This work can be incredibly demanding on a number of levels, and has the potential to significantly impact investigators (Hallett, 1996; Holmberg, 2004; Sewell, 1994).

Many issues and concerns identified in this study are shared by both ICE and other serious crime teams. What stands out in this study as significantly different is that ICE team members must witness horrific acts being perpetrated against infants, toddlers, children, and youth on an on-going basis. Over the course of their duties, team members have the responsibility not only to investigate child sexual assault; they must watch it happen first.

Watching a sexual crime being committed against a child on-line, live, on video or DVD with audio adds intensity to the work not necessarily experienced in other investigations. This also has the potential to impact some team members quite powerfully. A number of the coping mechanisms employed by participants seem also to have that same intensity.

Viewing. Team members routinely used dissociation to cope while exposed to very difficult and traumatizing material. Although very useful in the moment, this style of coping can have a negative long term impact, which is a concern for those choosing to remain in this type of police work for substantial periods of time. Participants who were able to remain objective and not engage empathically with the victim found that they experienced less impact and faired far better emotionally.

The findings about ICE workers' viewing strategies is new and offers extremely useful suggestions to those making policy decisions, managing units, and working on ICE teams. While it is important to note that everyone responds differently, and that not all factors will be relevant to all people, this information may be very beneficial as it was offered by participants experienced in the area of ICE investigations.

Participants found that being mentally prepared, viewing when fresh (preferably in the morning), being self aware, and stepping away when they began to feel emotions rising when viewing, limiting the amount of time spent on viewing each day, taking breaks, seeking out support from peers, and remaining analytical by focusing on the evidence in the images (not the eyes of the victims) are all strategies that helped them to cope with their work.

Remaining analytical, determining when, where and how to view, mental preparation, and taking breaks when required, all offer aspects of control to team members. It is possible the experience of being in control may mitigate some of the impact, and therefore help with coping. As an example, participants placed great significance on being mentally prepared prior to viewing. Several of the participants discussed a need to be in the right frame of mind for viewing, and the negative impact not being prepared had on them. They also discussed the hindering experiences due to lack of control over their workload and the CJS. Further exploration of the concept of control as a mitigating variable may be extremely beneficial.

Viewing when tired, emotional, or toward the end of the day, makes it far more difficult to remain objective when viewing the images, and to leave the images behind when participants go home for the day. The nature of the material being viewed, age of the victim(s), similarity in age or appearance to members' own children, the amount of viewing that must be done, and the length of time spent viewing, all hinder coping with ICE work.

Impact. This study did not measure how effectively team members were coping with ICE work, or the prevalence of symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. It was clear from the interviews that several of the individuals felt they were coping extremely well, and a few were not coping as well as they would have liked. Certainly, the type of exposure to potentially traumatizing material present in this work results in some extremely intense experiences which can leave a lasting impact. Many of the participants described experiencing a number of symptoms, including intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, headaches, horrible moods, loss of patience, feelings of anger, frustration, sadness, emotional eating, extreme exhaustion and fatigue, isolating behaviours, changes in thinking (including increased paranoia and suspicion), and over-protectiveness of children and other loved ones. Others expressed feelings of intense anger toward perpetrators, frustration toward society and toward parents who do not keep children safe. Some participants described the negative impact of their work on relationships, and an inability to maintain roles outside of the unit (spouse, parent, aunt or uncle, volunteer, friend) due to the level of exhaustion and negative mood. Some participants described being triggered by the sound of children crying.

Given the work ICE team members do, experiencing these symptoms is to be expected and is supported by the literature on secondary traumatic stress. What individuals need to pay attention to is the intensity and duration of these symptoms.

Experiencing the symptoms for a longer period of time and/or experiencing very severe symptoms is suggestive of greater difficulty coping with the exposure. In those circumstances seeking professional help is certainly warranted as a precaution.

Some participants did not find they were negatively impacted by the work. There may be a number of reasons for this. Some may have protective barriers that are effective in compartmentalizing what they are seeing. As images range in severity from relatively unintrusive to violent and sadistic, some participants also may not have been exposed to images they found truly overwhelming. Different personalities, different methods of coping, different levels of functioning, different levels of support, different outlets, different ways of thinking about the work, all play a role in the degree of impact exposure will have. Having other crises or negative life events happen within 12 months prior to exposure has been also found to place individuals at greater risk of developing secondary traumatic stress as coping resources are more depleted (Leonard & Alison, 1999).

It was interesting to note that some of the participants who did not have young children described the fact that not being a mother was helpful to them. They believed they were able to detach themselves more easily than their co-workers who had young children. This certainly did not prevent some of them from being negatively impacted by what they saw. In contrast, neither male nor female participants with young children identified having young children to be hindering; in fact, some reported that it gave them a stronger sense of purpose.

Personal threshold was clearly an issue with participants. Some participants identified having intrusive images in the form of nightmares and flashbacks that occurred routinely after viewing particularly difficult images. Others did not have that same experience. Aside from personal character, experience, job knowledge and training were all identified as factors that helped participants cope with the work. The majority of participants found that there were some types of images that were very impacting regardless of the amount of knowledge, training and experience they possessed.

Being the right person for the job was identified as particularly important. In her study with sexual assault investigators, Clarkson (2006) identified the importance of careful screening for candidates. Participants in the present study expressed concerns that the right people needed to be selected to work in the unit to prevent long-term negative impact on individuals. Incorporating exposure to images as a tool for pre-screening may be effective in excluding candidates who will not be able to handle these images.

Personal Strategies. Many of the personal strategies used by team members were very adaptive, and helped them to cope with the work. Some personal strategies used by several of the participants were less adaptive, but mirrored the intensity of the work. For example, achieving work and life balance was extremely adaptive and helpful. Having hobbies outside of work was very helpful. In addition to having hobbies in general, many participants specified that hobbies needed to be the type that distracted the mind and offered a sense of escape. Comments from several participants identified a need to continually keep their minds active. For some, if they had time to think, they were frequently assailed by unwanted and upsetting images. As a result, activities that allowed their minds to rest were avoided.

Many of the participants described exercise as helpful. Several of the participants indicated they found intense physical work-outs were helpful, as they offered an outlet to release anger and other emotions that had built up. A few participants described helpful strategies relating to intense workouts. As an example, one participant said she would think about particular aspects that had made her angry and then visualize herself burning off the negative energy by running as hard and as fast as she could. She often felt better afterwards.

Finally, several participants identified the importance of coming to terms with the realization of just how much one person can accomplish. ICE work can quickly become overwhelming. Participants need to realize they are but one person in the bigger picture working to prevent child exploitation. On their own, they make a great contribution, but they cannot solve the world's problems. Being able to recognize their limitations in the big picture and focus realistically on what they can do is extremely critical to their well-being.

Team. Another interesting point that emerged from the data that once again relates to the topic of intensity was the strength of relationships that exist amongst most of the ICE team members. In spite of the horrific nature of the work, team members appeared to be very connected with each other. I observed lots of laughter, and an ease and comfort in the interactions amongst the team members in the unit.

During the interviews, participants expressed a deep caring and emotional connection with their team mates. One participant used the words "close family", and another, "intimacy," to describe this feeling. The degree of closeness felt for each other may be a reflection of the nature of the work, their shared intense experiences, and the socially taboo nature of the material. As some participants mentioned during the interviews, there is a shared belief that unless someone has viewed graphic images, it is not possible to understand how horrific they can be. This group of highly dedicated professionals all have in common the fact that they have viewed these images, they all share the belief that child exploitation is indescribably horrific, and they are doing something to address it.

Because the subject matter is so graphic and traumatizing, team members seem to have developed a reliance on each other to provide the support and debriefing they needed. As they do not discuss details of the images with anyone outside of the unit, they relied upon their team to provide this type of support.

Participants' frequent use of humour may be used for a similar purpose. Given the mitigating factors associated with social support, it would be interesting to know if one of the reasons humour helps is that it allows team members to form a connection with each other, and share a bit of the pain or shock they might be experiencing as a result of viewing these images. Seeking each other out and having a sense of connection during such difficult and intense moments may reinforce the continued use of humour.

These close relationships appear to have incredibly beneficial aspects to them. Team members feel they can access support and assistance from their peers. These relationships add to their sense of motivation and to the positive experience of being on the team. They share laughter, pain, and understanding that those outside of the team would not necessarily comprehend. This may act as another mitigating factor in the development of secondary traumatic stress.

There are also some potential hindering aspects to this deep commitment to the team. Some of the participants expressed a reluctance to leave the unit, despite believing that they should. What compelled them to remain was, in part, this deep abiding commitment to the team. Some believed they could not leave because they would be abandoning their team mates. Having too much work with too few resources only compounded the degree of responsibility felt by these participants. One participant described feeling as though she would be abandoning her team were she to leave. Another expressed that leaving the team meant leaving the close family she had developed. This commitment leaves individuals exposed to the work longer than perhaps they should be. This issue should be considered and addressed in some way to help prevent the work from having a negative impact on the well-being of ICE team members.

Feelings of responsibility to victims. Another result of watching the videos and seeing the images of children being sexually assaulted, hurt, and tortured is the degree of responsibility some of the team members began to feel for finding and rescuing these victims. The investigators see the pain, and know these victims are out there somewhere. They also know that many of the victims continue to suffer ongoing abuse. The degree of responsibility and concern for the protection of these innocent children is further compounded by frustration as they contend with workload, resource, technological and logistical barriers that prevent them from doing all they could. Some participants worried about particular victims and described the horrible feeling that comes from knowing a perpetrator will continue to re-offend because the team does not have the immediate ability to stop them. This appears as another significant factor that prevents some of the members from leaving the unit when they know they should go – this powerful feeling of responsibility to the victims and feelings of guilt should they leave them.

Supervisors that understand the impact. A helping factor that stands out in this study relates to the quality of supervision. Participants indicated that they not only had incredible supervisors, they had supervisors who understood and respected the impact of ICE work. This knowledge and understanding resulted in a management style that was extremely conducive to the well-being of the team. Team members felt they were empowered to make decisions about approaches to investigations, and they were able to set their own limits, fostering a sense of control. If they needed to walk away, they were certain in the fact they would be supported. The many participants who identified this factor also expressed this to be key in helping them cope with the work.

Inability to talk about the images. Some participants identified talking as one of their primary coping mechanisms. Unfortunately, given the nature of the work, they often feel they are not able to talk to anyone outside of the unit. Some participants spent a great deal of energy shielding others from the reality of what they themselves are exposed to. Several participants spoke with their spouses about how they were feeling and the impact the work was having, but would not provide details on the images they had seen. This finding mirrored results from Clarkson's (2006) study with sexual assault investigators. Those investigators talked about the need to shield their families from the details of their investigations. For some, the consequence of not being able to talk about disturbing aspects of their job with an intimate, supportive spouse or family member results in a feeling of isolation, and a loss of the ability to use a very important coping mechanism they ordinarily rely upon. This has been described as extremely hindering to the well-being of some of the team members.

Societal Response to ICE members. Several participants described the shocked response of others when they found out team members worked in ICE. Many provided examples of times when they were virtually shunned by others, once they found out where they worked. The assumption by participants was that child exploitation is so off limits and unspeakable, that people were too uncomfortable with the topic to have a conversation. This resulted in a feeling of being stigmatized because of the work that they do. This extended within the policing universe. Several talked about the negative reactions of other police officers when they discovered where participants worked. Clarkson (2006) and Hallett (1996) identified similar feelings of isolation by participants in their research with sexual assault investigators.

An unfortunate perception exists that engaging in ICE work is somehow offensive. This results in a feeling of social isolation. Instead of being proud of the vital work they do, some participants described feeling that they needed to conceal the nature of their work. Several mentioned they tell people only that they work in “Major Crime” as that appears to be more socially acceptable and they get a far more appropriate response. One participant described how she felt like “one of the gals” at an exercise class until she was asked what she did. Some of the participants, both male and female, explained that working on the ICE team appears to have negatively defined them. As one participant poignantly phrased it, she sometimes felt like the “red-headed ugly sister under the staircase that everyone knew about, but no one wanted to meet.”

Psychological Support. Participants talked about the helpful nature of having an ongoing relationship with their psychologists. A few participants felt they were more likely to access outside help on a regular basis because of this relationship. If a relationship was established, some participants felt more comfortable opening up, and felt better understood by their psychologists. This may be of particular relevance to specialized groups such as this, whose members have a limited pool of support they can be completely open with.

In addition to findings in the literature that stress the importance of having professional helpers who understand the policing culture, and coping mechanisms used by those in policing, some participants felt it was important for psychologists who work with ICE team members to have some exposure to the images, and to have an understanding of the coping mechanisms utilized in the work. In keeping with the belief that those who have not seen graphic images are not able to understand, some of the participants indicated it would be important for them to know their psychologists had been inoculated. This would allow them to feel better understood and supported.

Most participants found mandatory psychological assessments beneficial, although not all had been to one. A few of the participants said that knowing they were to have regular assessments offered a sense of comfort, in that it provided a safety net. If they or their peers or supervisors, were not able to identify they were having a problem, then they felt the assessment process would catch it.

Some of the participants identified having difficulty selecting a psychologist. Given the somewhat cautious and suspicious nature of some individuals in policing, participants suggested there should be some way for them to find out more about the psychologists, to help them select one. A list of names and locations was not enough information to select someone that team members were expected to trust and open up to. Developing an information sheet or having some type of mechanism in place that would assist individuals in making selections might result in more individuals accessing psychological resources. Once a relationship is established, they may be more likely to access this resource, when needed.

Overall, participants expressed a need to learn more about normal reactions and symptoms associated with ICE work. Several expressed concern that they might not recognize when they were no longer functioning adequately. There were allusions to other problems and symptoms some of the team might be experiencing, including issues relating to sexuality.

Psycho-educational sessions designed to educate team members about symptoms, reactions, and ways to cope, may go a long way toward alleviating some of the concerns ICE team members may have but chose not to express in their interviews. Some participants suggested education for family members might be helpful. Sessions for families designed to increase awareness, understanding and potential impacts, symptoms to watch for, and effective ways to support their loved ones may add other layers of support for the families of ICE team members directly, and team members indirectly. This is particularly important because many of the participants identified spouses and family members as being significant sources of support.

An additional consideration might involve decisions regarding file assignments, based upon individual circumstances. Some investigations may be more difficult for a particular investigator: for example, a parent of two young girls may not be best suited for a file requiring significant viewing involving the sexual abuse of young girls (Clarkson, 2006; Hallett, 1996; Sewell, 2004). According to participants, rotating job duties, placing firm limits on the quantity of viewing and amount of time involved in viewing offers additional ways for the organization to support ICE team members.

Understanding the Reality of ICE

Although participants involved with the ICE team came in to the job with a relatively good understanding about the work, many found they experienced a great deal of shock as the reality of what some people in our society do to children became apparent. In addition to being exposed to the horrifying levels of depravity, they were shocked and upset at the unbelievable volume of child exploitation cases that come to the attention of the unit. There is no true measure of how much child exploitation is going on in the world. However, participants believed that what they were aware of was only the tip of the iceberg.

Witnessing the reality of child exploitation, participants and their team mates dedicate themselves to making every effort to identify child victims, locate the perpetrators, and build criminal cases that will withstand the onerous tests of the justice system. Their dedication to the cause of alleviating the suffering of children is fierce, with a common goal of stopping perpetrators and keeping children safe.

Working with this reality on a daily basis, participants expressed incredible frustration at the inadequate responses of society, the CJS, and even their own policing organization. Citing that the stolen auto unit has far more resources than the ICE team, participants remarked, "How can they keep their heads in the sand?" "How can they allow this to continue?" "Where is our society?" "Why aren't they doing anything to stop it?" Their outrage was quite apparent.

Lack of understanding of child exploitation. It is clear there is a degree of understanding on every level about child exploitation. The ICE unit was funded by the provincial government in recognition that there was, and is, a problem. Criminal cases have proceeded through the court system, and communities across BC continue to request presentations to gain more knowledge on this issue. Child exploitation is acknowledged as reprehensible by almost every segment of society. The difference between the response to child exploitation from those outside of the unit, and from those within, is level of knowledge and awareness. As participants themselves stated, they knew the situation was bad when they came onto the unit, but they had no idea of the actual scope and magnitude of the issue. Once acquiring that knowledge, an overwhelming sense of frustration emerged. The organizational entities that have the potential and influence to prevent or reduce child exploitation do not possess the same level of awareness, and therefore are not moved sufficiently to authorize more drastic measures to deal effectively with these issues. ICE team members are left charting this relatively new frontier, forging ahead without a road map or the supports they need to be really effective.

Society. Participants expressed frustration that society seems to be unaware of the scope and consequence of the problem. As a result, children continue to be exposed to dangers of victimization, and parents continue to place their children at risk, not out of a lack of caring for their children, but out of ignorance.

Participants also discussed the impact of continually advancing technology. Without governmental supports in place to assist in developing rules to address issues such as the sharing of information from telecommunications companies and other vitally important areas, team members will fall further behind in their capacity to investigate the perpetrators.

The internet provides great opportunity for the creation and distribution of graphic images of child sexual abuse by collectors and preferential child molesters, in an anonymous worldwide community. With advances in technology, the capability for file storage and data transfer will continue to expand, creating even more opportunities for those who prey upon children.

As the internet offers no boundaries, current legislation that exists in relation to child exploitation in other countries is also extremely hindering. Participants repeatedly stated that these issues and challenges will continue to increase unless society takes account of what is happening, and makes concrete changes to laws and current practices.

Criminal Justice System. As technology alters and shifts the entire canvas of reality, so too must the CJS change to keep up with crimes now perpetrated using the internet. The requirements Crown Counsel have set for child exploitation cases, including the viewing and documentation of every image, greatly restricts the number of predators the team can pursue. Due to the volume of electronically stored images on many predators' computers and the requirements of the CJS, it takes technical support staff approximately 18 months to return forensic evidence to investigators. It can take team members years to go through the enormous number of images stored digitally on predators' computers, all to lay charges that may result in very minor sentences, if any sentence at all. The judiciary's unwillingness to view the images prevents them from acquiring an accurate understanding of the true nature of child exploitation, and results in more work for the investigators, who must continue to document each image to satisfy the courts.

Policing organization. Participants expressed frustration about the lack of understanding of the needs of the ICE team by the policing organization. It was commonly believed by participants that if the organization had full comprehension of the reality of child exploitation, the unit would receive the support they required. The ICE team is approximately 35 people short, based upon the initial proposal set by the provincial government when the unit was established in 2003. Although the unit is completely reliant upon the assistance of technical support, there is only one technical support staff person dedicated full time to ICE - one of two in the province of BC.

Participants identified a pressing need for additional technical support staff, more staffing resources for investigations, suitable people to work on the ICE team, an office environment more conducive to the work, and commitment to training that would allow ICE team members to keep up with the technical aspects of the job.

Significance and Implications for the RCMP

This study is unique as this specific topic of research has been largely unexplored in the published literature. To date there have been no studies published on the impact of coping with ICE work. The findings that have been described provide foundational knowledge to set the stage for future research in the area. They broaden knowledge and aid understanding of what helps and hinders coping with ICE work. As the RCMP continues in its efforts to develop and maintain healthy operational workplaces, organizational leaders will now have additional information on which to base their decisions and policies.

This added knowledge may also be used for those currently serving in, and those contemplating joining, the unit. The pragmatic information obtained through this study will afford individuals opportunities to learn more about what experienced ICE team members perceive as helpful, and perhaps allow them to incorporate many of the strategies into their current or future repertoires. The knowledge gained through the experiences of the participants may result in changes in scheduling, behaviour, ways of relating to others, and in the frequency of accessing psychological help. These findings constitute suggestions that may assist ICE unit members in remaining physically and psychologically healthy.

Contribution to the Field

This study also provides a meaningful contribution to the scholarly literature, as it expands current knowledge in the area of secondary traumatic stress. Participants in the majority of studies conducted on the topic of secondary traumatic stress have been therapists working with victims of trauma. This particular study will become part of the emerging literature that expands our knowledge of secondary traumatic stress in the policing environment, where individuals are routinely exposed to extremely difficult events and situations. An additional and unique aspect of ICE work is that these team members are exposed to visual and audio images of horrific crimes being perpetrated against children, rather than the narrative recollections that therapists tend to experience. Extending secondary traumatic stress research into the ICE unit population has provided an opportunity to test the relevance of the existing knowledge of secondary traumatic stress in relation to its applicability to populations other than mental health professionals.

Implications for Practitioners

The findings also have excellent potential to inform the practice of counselling psychologists working with ICE team members. The more knowledge that counsellors and psychologists acquire about what helps and hinders in coping with the work, the better equipped they will be to provide the best psychological care for those working on ICE teams.

Several of the participants highlighted the importance of having access to psychologists who know about the policing culture. Psychologists who have an understanding of the issues related to the policing organization, the power structure, hierarchy, the organizational issues, dynamics and the frustrations endemic to the job are critical pieces of knowledge that help professionals to empathize and validate the experiences of police officers. Knowing about the regular use of specific coping mechanisms such as dark humour, are critically important as they allow those who work with team members greater insight which will assist team members in feeling better understood.

Participants also expressed a desire to access psychologists who know about ICE work specifically. As several of the participants indicated, “unless the professional is aware of what we see and how it impacts us, it is virtually impossible for them to understand how we feel.”

The information contained within this study provides some limited insight into the culture of the policing organization, some issues and concerns faced by team members, and information on the lived experience of working on an ICE team.

Limitations of the Research

Although participants came from a variety of professional backgrounds, and represent a range of ages and cultures, they have all been exposed to work on the same unit, and provided information about their experiences working with the “E” Division ICE team. While the information presented in this study is very rich, and should resonate with individuals on other ICE teams across North America, there may be issues and concerns specific to the “E” Division ICE team that have emerged in the themes and categories. For example, other ICE units may be less under-resourced, or they may not have the same high quality supervision that these participants experienced. These differences may reflect pervasive attitudes, experiences and realities that are specific to this particular team.

It was my intention to thoroughly explore what helps and hinders coping on an ICE unit. I was fortunate to meet many of the ICE team members during the inoculation session, where I was exposed to selected graphic images and video of child sexual assault. It was important that all participants felt comfortable talking openly about both their positive and negative experiences. Knowing I had been inoculated was identified as helpful by some of the participants. As previously mentioned, the policing environment can be quite closed. There is a belief among many police officers that being competent means they must handle all aspects of the job, and that any sign of weakness is a slight against their professionalism. Although the participants appeared to be quite comfortable and open during the interviews, it is likely that some were not as comfortable discussing certain issues and elected to withhold aspects of their experiences. The semi-structured open interview format employed with the CIT methodology empowers participants to decide what information is revealed. This creates safety, but also results in a limitation, in that the entire topic may not have been exhaustively explored.

This study was not designed to measure the levels of secondary traumatic stress of team members. The findings do not account for the degree to which participants experienced secondary traumatic stress (if they did), or what specifically may have contributed to the development of secondary traumatic stress. Although participants completed a demographic questionnaire in which they indicated their level of coping on a scale from 1-10 (10 indicating coping very well), this measure was subjective and did not always accurately reflect the description and behaviours of some of the participants.

What this study does reveal is the range of activities, experiences and circumstances that team members found to be helpful and hindering, to coping with the work. These findings may cast light on more general topics, but this study was not designed to capture or measure any data outside of its primary focus. The information provided by this study will serve as a foundation from which to explore issues of prevalence and severity in future research studies.

Implications for Future Research

As this study was meant to provide a preliminary glimpse into the world of ICE team members, and utilized a methodology that allowed participants the ability to select the information they chose to share, there are a number of areas for future research.

It might prove interesting to explore the experiences of other ICE teams, to see how they compare to the “E” Division ICE team, and identify the similarities and differences between the experiences of team members in North America and across the globe. For example, is the close, family feel of the unit typical of the type of work that participants engage in, or is it more characteristic of the small size of the unit or the individuals who are on this particular ICE team?

It would also be extremely useful to quantitatively measure the impact of ICE work on team members' functioning. Results of this study demonstrate that exposure to graphic images has the potential to impact some team members in significant ways. It would be interesting and worthwhile to measure the levels of secondary traumatic stress in ICE team members, and explore possible gender differences, and the effects of having children, on stress levels.

It may also be valuable to explore the individual differences between the team members who are more severely affected and those who are not. In the long-term, identifying key protective factors may improve candidate selection for this type of work.

Given the relationship between dissociation and posttraumatic stress disorder, it would be beneficial to explore the presence of dissociation during viewing of traumatic material in the ICE team population and the long term impact this may have on the wellbeing of team members.

The existing literature has identified compassion satisfaction and personal meaning are key factors in mitigating secondary traumatic stress. It would be valuable to explore whether these findings are applicable to ICE work. Certainly participants reported they found a great deal of personal meaning in this work.

Exploring the impact of ICE work on individuals, using a narrative or phenomenological methodology, may also prove valuable. This information would further develop a greater understanding of the impact of ICE work, and may further assist in the development of helpful interventions for ICE members.

Finally, some of the findings in this study may be pertinent for future studies in policing, with respect to understanding the impact of serious crime investigations on individuals.

Conclusion

The goal of this CIT study was to identify what helps and hinders coping with ICE work. The purpose of the research was to discover more effective ways to support team members working in this specialized unit. Over the course of their duties, ICE unit members can experience a number of frustrations and challenges inherent in many serious crime investigations. Further compounding this work, team members are exposed to graphic and disturbing stories, images and video of child sexual abuse and torture. They are also at the mercy of advancing technology, an outdated legal system, and crimes with global implications. As one participant described it “it is the best of policing, it is the worst of policing.” Their passion is readily apparent. These dedicated professionals work long hours conducting intensely personal investigations, in an effort to save innocent children and prevent further harm.

Results from this study provide information about what helps and hinders coping with ICE work. Twelve helping categories with 40 subcategories, and 12 hindering categories with 35 subcategories were developed, based upon participant interviews. From this information, we are offered a glimpse into the world of the “E” Division ICE team. Information contained in the helpful and hindering categories may provide some insight to management, team members, potential candidates to the unit, and professionals offering psychological interventions.

Participants in this study emphasized the critical importance for people at all levels of society, including parents, concerned citizens, law-makers, those within the criminal justice system and policing organizations, to learn more about child exploitation. Real commitments must be made to work collectively to find more effective ways to combat the daily indignities perpetrated against the most vulnerable of our society.

> It takes a village to raise a child. The ancient African proverb teaches eternal truth. No man, woman or family is an island. We'd all like to think we live in a place where people care about others -- where people pitch in to help when things get rough -- where it's safe to leave the doors unlocked and let the kids play around outside (Waldrop, 1999).

The message, the hope expressed through my brief encounter with those who strive against seemingly impossible odds, was the shared, implacable conviction that it was time for all to step up to the plate and fulfill our responsibility to our future generations, to ensure they too can live safe and happy lives.

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Appendix A Sample Demographic Questionnaire

What Helps and What Hinders Coping with ICE Work: A Critical Incident Study
Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age: ________________

2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other_____________

3. Status: ☐ Regular Member ☐ Civilian ☐ Other ______________________

4. **What is your role on the team? ____**

____

5. How long have you or did you work on the ICE team? __________

Months

6. How long have you been away from the team? __________ Months

7. Percentage of time spent in contact with potentially disturbing images? ______%

8. How long have you worked with the RCMP or policing agency? _______ Months

9. Are you in a supportive intimate relationship? ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Do you have children? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please list gender and age for each child

1. ☐ Male ☐ Female **Age: _______**

2. ☐ Male ☐ Female **Age: _______**

3. ☐ Male ☐ Female **Age: _______**

4. ☐ Male ☐ Female **Age: _______**

11. On a scale of 1 – 10 how would you describe your level of coping with ICE work?

1 = not coping well **5** = average **10**= coping very well

Circle: 1 – 2 - 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10

Appendix B Sample Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Trinity Western University
What Helps and Hinders Coping with Integrated Child Exploitation Work:
A Critical Incident Study

Consent Form for Research Project Participation

Carolyn M. Burns - Principal Investigator/Interviewer
MA Counselling Psychology student 604 532-3215

Jeff Morley, Ph.D. – Supervisor
RCMP 604 264- 2191

Rick Bradshaw, Ph.D. – Second Reader
Department of Counselling Psychology
(604) 513-2121 (Ext. 3382)

This consent form outlines the basic purposes and procedures of this research project.

Purpose and Benefits

You are invited to participate in this study seeking to understand what facilitates or hinders coping with ICE work. Your unique and valuable personal perspective on ICE work will be sought in order to deepen our understanding of how to create an optimum environment for unit members. Furthermore, the information gained from this research may be useful to ICE team members and in similar units to assist in recognizing what helps and hinders coping.

For the purposes of this study you must be a current or former ICE team member or civilian employee.

Procedures

You are being asked to participate in the following procedures.

1. **Demographics Questionnaire** – This survey will require 5 minutes. The questionnaire will request basic background information such as your age, position, and family situation information.
2. **Interview** – This interview will require between 45 and 75 minutes. The interview will consist of the principal interviewer asking some questions about what has helped or hindered you in coping with ICE work. The interview will be audio recorded by a digital recorder.
3. You may be asked to participate in a **follow up interview** requiring 30 minutes of your time to review the information gathered from your interview and to see if the categories coming out of the interviews fit with your experience.

Confidentiality

Your identity will be confidential within the limits of law. You will be assigned a case number for written documents and digital files. The list that matches the code numbers with your name will be kept in a fire proof, locked filing cabinet separate from the data. Any identifying information in oral recordings will be removed from transcripts (typed records of oral interviews).The only individuals who will have access to identifiable written or recorded data will be the researcher, and the research team. A group of Masters level independent raters, under doctoral supervision, will have access to transcripts for rating purposes following the removal of any identifying information. All questionnaires, interview recordings and interview transcripts will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet. Access to non-identifying records will be restricted to individuals directly involved in the research study. Following the completion of the study the recordings will be destroyed and only the anonymous transcripts with all identifiers removed will be kept. These anonymous transcripts will be numbered with correlating numbers to the demographic information but will not enable anyone to trace the interview back to the participant. The anonymous data will be kept indefinitely. The data collected will be used for research and education purposes.

Risks, Stress or Discomfort

As with any new experience, you may experience some minor anxiety or stress being involved in a research study. The principle interviewer will aim to minimize any experienced anxiety or stress. Questions are welcomed and encouraged throughout your study involvement. Your well-being is of utmost importance throughout this process.

This study seeks to understand what has facilitated or hindered your coping with ICE work. Although efforts have been very carefully invested to ensure that the nature of the questionnaire and interview questions will not be emotionally concerning to you, there is a small possibility that a question might be difficult for you to answer. In the event that you experience an uncomfortable emotional response, inform the interviewer immediately and you will be led through a series of relaxation exercises to allow you to return to a safe and comfortable emotional state.

Furthermore, it is possible that the questions in the interview may trigger memories of difficult images or situations. In the event that you begin to remember emotionally concerning materials please inform the interviewer immediately and the interviewer will lead you through relaxation exercises to allow you to return to a safe and comfortable emotional state, before resuming the interview.

Contact

If you have questions or would like further information with respect to the study or procedures (or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in the research) you are welcome to contact the Principle Interviewer, Carolyn Burns at (604)-532-3215 or carolyn.burns@rcmp-grc.gc.ca, Dr. Jeff Morley at (604) 264- 2191, or Dr.

Rick Bradshaw at 604 513-2121 Ext. 3382. If at any time you have questions about your treatment or rights as a research subject do not hesitate to contact Ms. Sue Funk in the Office of Research at Trinity Western University at (604) 513-2142. If you are interested in the findings of this study please contact Carolyn Burns.

Participant's Statement

Your signature below indicates that the research study has been explained to you, that you have been given adequate opportunity to ask questions, and that you understand that any future questions that you may have about the research will be answered by the principle investigator listed above.

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily consent to participate in this study; you understand that you are free to refuse or withdraw participation at any time without consequence, and you acknowledge that the information that you provide will be stored in anonymous form, and may be used for future research and educational purposes. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature also indicates that you consent to participate in this study and that your responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after this study.

______________________	______________________	______________________
Signature of Participant	Print Name	Date
______________________	______________________	______________________
Principle Investigator	Print Name	Date

Appendix C Sample Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

This protocol is designed for the adult participants of this study. Some wording may very with each participant.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:

1. Participants are offered an opportunity to have any questions answered.
2. Participants will sign the informed consent document.
3. Participants will be oriented to the interview using the following script:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am interested in hearing what you have to say about what helps and hinders you in coping with ICE work. I will be asking you to think about some of the things that happen relating to the work you do on the ICE team that lead you to feel really good about the work and working on the team, and things that happen that cause distress or make it difficult to cope. These might be things people say or do, the type of tasks you are assigned to, things you might do for yourself - anything at all that might impact how you cope.

I will be asking you to describe these to me in detail and will ask you follow up questions to be sure I understand exactly what you are saying. I am hoping the information provided by you and all of the participants will help us learn how to better support members in the unit. The information you provide to me today will be kept in the strictest of confidence. The data as a whole will be reported on. Those results will be made available to all of the participants, to the RCMP and other ICE units.

Prior to the interview, I just want to let you know that some people find they become emotional when they are discussing more difficult aspects of the work. If you find you are having an uncomfortable emotional response, just let me know and I will pause the interview to lead you through a series of relaxation exercises until you return to a safe and comfortable emotional state, before resuming the interview.
(Before proceeding I will ask the participant if they have any further questions.)

Starting Question(s)

To begin the process the interviewees will be asked to:

Think back over your time on the ICE team. Can you remember a specific event that you believe either helped or made it harder for you to cope with the work?

Follow-up & Probing Questions

1. Can you tell me what it was about the event that made it helpful (or hindering)?
2. What meaning did this particular incident hold for you?

Probing questions are intended to elicit additional details and may take the form of the following:

1. "Exactly what happened that you found helpful or hindering?"

2. “How did you know?”
3. “What went on before/after?”
4. “How did it turn out?”
5. “Can you tell me more about that?”

Debriefing Guide

At the end of the interview, two final questions will be put to the participants. They are designed to assist them in summing up their thoughts and ideas and will help give closure to the interview:

1. “What advice or suggestions would you give to someone new to the unit?”
2. “What advice would you give to someone in the process of developing an ICE unit?”

After the participant has finished, I will ask the following:

This ends the formal part of the interview. Before we are finished here, I wanted to give you the opportunity to ask any further questions or raise any concerns you might have about your involvement in this study.

If you would like to be informed of any of the results of this study, arrangements can be made to meet again with me, or to engage in a discussion over the phone, or e mail following completion of transcription data analysis for debriefing. I will send you a summary of the results of this study if you are interested. A formal copy of the study may be accessed through the Counselling Psychology Department at Trinity Western University, or through the Norma Marion Alloway Library at Trinity Western University.

(If the participant was emotional during the interview or expressed any concerns about their ability to cope, I will take extra time to ensure the participants have returned to an emotionally safe place. I will have a list of contact names and numbers for Member Assistance Program personnel and Force Psychologists to provide to any participant in the event they experience emotional distress after leaving the interview.)