OPERATIONAL STRESS AND THE POLICE MARRIAGE:
A NARRATIVE STUDY OF POLICE SPOUSES

by

Alanna Jean Thompson

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2008

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Counselling Psychology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2012

© Alanna Jean Thompson, 2012
Abstract

Routine exposure to violence in the community, and witnessing the harm and death of others while on-the-job places police officers at risk of developing traumatic stress over time. Research indicates that operational stress experienced by the officer can “spillover” to his or her home life, and a spouse or significant other can become traumatized by association, a concept known as secondary trauma. The direct impact of operational stress on the individual officer has been examined, and studies that consider its effects on police spouses and the marital relationship are based primarily on survey data. The quality of police marriages appears to be dependent on the ability of the couple to cope effectively with this “spillover” effect. The present study includes the stories of eight female spouses of police officers, and explores their perspectives on the experience of being married to a police officer who encounters operational stress, and the impact of stress and coping strategies on the marital relationship. Data were collected using the Life Story interview method, the stories were transcribed verbatim and narrative summaries were created from the transcripts. Coding of the data was done using qualitative data analysis software and a thematic analysis was conducted, resulting in the creation of nine themes and 18 subthemes. These themes illustrate the unique stressors arising from policing, and the individual and relational coping strategies used within the couple relationship to foster resilience and maintain the marriage over time. The results do fit the concept of the spillover effect and the theory of dyadic coping, indicating that individuals within couple relationships do not cope with stress in isolation. Social support is viewed as a buffer against the development of traumatic stress, and findings from this study will help to inform the creation of new treatment and prevention initiatives aimed at enhancing support for police families, other first-responder groups, and couples that experience elevated stress levels over an extended period of time.
Preface

This research study was conducted in accordance with the protocol approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). Ethics Certificate number H11-00157 was issued by BREB on April 18, 2011.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................. ii

Preface.................................................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgements.............................................................................................................. vii

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
  The problem....................................................................................................................... 1
  Background and rationale................................................................................................. 1
  Purpose of the study.......................................................................................................... 3
  Significance of the study................................................................................................. 4

Chapter 2: Literature review ................................................................................................. 5
  Police stress....................................................................................................................... 5
  Operational stressors ....................................................................................................... 5
  Stress, coping, and trauma............................................................................................... 6
  Coping strategies of police officers ................................................................................ 7
    Problem-focused coping ................................................................................................. 7
    Emotion-focused coping ............................................................................................... 8
    Critical incident stress debriefing ................................................................................ 9
    Social support as stress buffer ..................................................................................... 12
  Work-family conflict ........................................................................................................ 13
    Trauma transmission and spousal stress ..................................................................... 14
    Stress and the marital relationship .............................................................................. 16
    Relational coping strategies in the marriage ............................................................... 17
    Dyadic coping theory .................................................................................................... 17

Chapter 3: Methodology ........................................................................................................ 20
  Introduction....................................................................................................................... 20
  Research design ............................................................................................................... 20
    Overview and rationale ................................................................................................. 20
  Participants....................................................................................................................... 21
    Melissa ............................................................................................................................ 21
    Cathy ............................................................................................................................. 22
    Joan ............................................................................................................................... 22
    Pauline ............................................................................................................................ 22
    Tamara ............................................................................................................................ 22
    Karen ............................................................................................................................. 23
    Lisa ................................................................................................................................ 23
    Michelle .......................................................................................................................... 23
  Recruitment ...................................................................................................................... 23
  Data collection .................................................................................................................. 24
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Policing as a lifestyle versus policing as just a job
- Hypervigilance
- Never off-duty
- Taking a backseat
- Flexibility for family time
- Friends outside of policing

The value of social support
- Social support from family
- Social support from co-workers
- Camaraderie

Lessening the emotional impact through detachment and humour
- Emotional detachment
- Black humour

Problem-focused coping within and beyond the department
- Exercise
- Seeking professional counselling
- Hobbies and activities

Feeling like an outsider
- Concern about the potential for infidelity
- A perceived lack of recognition of spouses

Vicarious emotions

Willing to talk, and willing to pay attention
- Comfort from knowledge about the job
- Noticing non-verbals
- Staying connected

Taking a break, or taking a stand

Healthy distractions as a couple

Summary

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Implications for theory
- Work-family conflict: The spillover effect
- Dyadic coping

Novel contributions

Significance of the findings

Future research
Thoughts and recommendations .................................................................62
For other police couples ........................................................................62
For the police organization .................................................................63

References ..............................................................................................67

Appendices .............................................................................................72
Appendix A: Narrative summaries ..........................................................72
  Melissa’s story ..................................................................................72
  Cathy’s story ......................................................................................85
  Joan’s story ......................................................................................101
  Pauline’s story ................................................................................126
  Tamara’s story ................................................................................140
  Karen’s story ...................................................................................157
  Lisa’s story ......................................................................................181
  Michelle’s story ..............................................................................205
Appendix B: Interview protocol .............................................................224
Appendix C: Letter of invitation to participants ......................................226
Appendix D: Participant consent form ..................................................228
Appendix E: List of resources for support ..............................................232
Acknowledgements

I offer my sincere gratitude to my co-researchers – the eight women who spoke so openly and told of the challenges and strengths of their relationship, their commitment to their partner, and the strategies they use to maintain their marriage. I thank Dr. Marla Buchanan, my research supervisor, for her supportive guidance and enthusiasm throughout the development of this project, and for sharing with me her knowledge and expertise in the areas of traumatic stress and narrative inquiry. I also thank my thesis committee members Dr. Marv Westwood for his encouraging feedback and assistance in connecting with useful resources throughout the process, and Dr. Donal O Donoghue for his incredibly thoughtful questions, and for inspiring me to consider creative ways of conducting research and how we think about another’s experience.

I appreciate the support of Dr. Jeff Morley, his availability to respond to my various questions and concerns, and his assistance in the recruitment process. I am also grateful for the willingness of my various contacts to assist with recruitment through word-of-mouth, and for their questions and encouragement that kept me going.

A special thank you to my friends and family for their enduring support, patience, and love. In particular, my husband Gord, who has supported me since the beginning of my academic career by indulging my sweet tooth while I write, listening to my ideas, offering healthy distractions when needed, and always challenging me to continue pushing through my anxiety to reach my next goal. To the little one that we are expecting later this year, you have given me the strength and motivation to complete this work, and I can’t wait to meet you!
Chapter 1: Introduction

The problem

The role of a police officer is unique in that he or she is exposed to violence in the community on a daily basis. They are required to remain calm and use their judgment to make quick decisions in the face of danger, and must be able to deescalate the emotions of the individuals that they encounter in their work, in order to maintain public safety. In the course of their work, officers experience stressors such as constant public scrutiny; shift work; time constraints when responding to calls; exposure to violent acts; and witnessing the harm and death of others that can lead to the development of traumatic stress over time (Toch, 2002). The occupational stress experienced by the police officer can ‘spillover’ to his or her home life (Roberts & Levenson, 2001), and a spouse or significant other can become traumatized by association, a concept known as secondary trauma (Figley, 1995). This study explores the lived experience of police spouses, in order to understand how this population of individuals and their marital relationship may be impacted by the stressful nature of policing.

Background and rationale

The culture of policing is powerful. It is expected that new recruits become quickly acculturated to their environment, one that emphasizes the importance of honour and loyalty among its members (Woody, 2005). The feeling of solidarity among officers is strong, and develops as individuals learn to support each other while facing daily uncertainty and potentially dangerous situations. The experiences that are shared and understood by fellow officers strengthen feelings of support and loyalty while providing individuals with a sense of belonging to a close-knit group (Toch, 2002). The need to remain alert at all times to illegal activity and threats to personal safety can lead a police officer to become suspicious of others (Amaranto,
Steinberg, Castellano, & Mitchell, 2003). This attitude of distrust, although beneficial in the line of duty, can become a problem if it extends beyond the workplace to interactions with family and friends.

Under stress, the development of emotional bonds at work can have a detrimental influence on interpersonal relationships as officers begin to distance themselves from family and friends, potentially creating an “us versus them” attitude (Miller, 2007; Woody, 2005). In an effort to appear in control, maintain the home as a safe place free of trauma, and avoid burdening the family with stress, the officer may avoid discussing their operational experiences with their spouse (Alexander & Walker, 1996; Toch, 2002). Their on-the-job skills in maintaining authority and appearing emotionally detached may carry over to their relationship with their spouse and other family members, potentially causing stress and conflict in the home (Thompson, Kirk, & Brown, 2005).

Recent studies indicate an increased likelihood of marital conflict within police couples following officers’ experiences of operational stress (Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005), and increased ratings of psychological distress among the spouses of officers who report the presence of trauma symptoms such as avoidance and emotional detachment (Davidson, Berah, & Moss, 2006). While much of the research over the last thirty years has examined the direct impact of operational stress on the officer as an individual, studies that have considered its effects on police spouses and the marital relationship are based on survey data (Alexander & Walker, 1996; Davidson et al.; Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Thompson et al., 2005), and have focused on the negative sequelae of marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005). A study examining the relationship maintenance strategies used by active and retired police officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and their spouses,
in light of the unique elements of a career in the RCMP (Carrington, 2006), found overall that these couples continuously worked together to search for a balance between the demands of work and home life. The current study adds to these findings by exploring the perspectives of police spouses from both municipal police departments and the RCMP, with a focus on spouses of active-duty members currently exposed to operational stress.

Due to the primary use of surveys in previous research with police families, little is known about the experiences of police spouses. What remains to be explored is how they experience their marital relationship in the context of workplace stress and trauma. An in-depth exploration of this topic is vital to increasing our understanding of operational stress, its transmission to significant others, and how it may impact the marital relationship.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research is to present a rich portrayal of the experience of being married to a police officer. In providing an opportunity for police spouses to share their stories, I hope to raise awareness of their experiences, needs, and challenges in providing love and support to those responsible for maintaining public safety, and receiving love and support from their partners in return. The primary research question for this study is: What is the experience of being married to a police officer who encounters operational stress in the workplace? Secondary research questions to be addressed in this project include: What individual and relational coping strategies are used to address stress within the marital relationship? How does the spouse perceive himself or herself to be impacted by the operational stress and coping strategies of their partner? Is there a perceived change in the impact on the marital relationship, and the use of relational coping strategies over the course of the police officer’s career?
Significance of the study

Police marriages are at risk for marital discord and divorce (Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Woody, 2005; Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005), and the quality of these marital relationships appears to be dependent on the ability of the police couple to cope effectively with the “spillover” of workplace stress to the family environment. By developing a deeper understanding of the individual and relational coping strategies within police marriages, and gaining insight into how this relationship may evolve over time, the findings from this study will inform the development of training programs and resources aimed at enhancing resilience factors for both officers and their spouses, as effective coping within marital relationships is viewed as a buffer against the development of traumatic stress (Bodenmann, 2005; Patterson, 2002). Results can also contribute to the use of specific interventions in marital and family therapy such as effective strategies for emotion-focused coping, and can provide useful information to individuals in other helping professions who may be experiencing operational stress and searching for a balance between the domains of work and marriage.
Chapter 2: Literature review

Police stress

In a comprehensive review of police stress literature, Abdollahi (2002) categorized police stress into four domains: intra-interpersonal stressors (those related to the personality of the individual); organizational stressors, including tasks and aspects related to the police organization; occupational stressors, also known as operational stressors (Brown, Fielding, & Grover, 1999), which result from job-specific duties such as exposure to violent crime, shift work, and witnessing the suffering of victims; and the consequences, both physical and mental, of a career in policing. Throughout her analysis, Abdollahi noted the complexity involved in measuring police stress and subsequently, the contradictory nature of the findings to date. She highlighted the need for concise definitions of police stressors and empirical research based on theory, in order to better understand the causes and consequences of the problem. Given that participants in the current study were recruited from different police organizations, and the nature of organizational stressors may be different, operational stress is the focus of this study, as it appears to be a universal concept among different police agencies. The consequences of such stress will be highlighted in later sections on coping and work-family conflict, as they pertain to the current study.

Operational stressors.

The stress experienced by police officers as they carry out their duties on patrol include the awareness of the potential for physical danger, exposure to public scrutiny, attendance to sudden deaths, domestic violence incidents, motor vehicle fatalities, and next-of-kin notifications, among other critical incidents (Brown, Fielding, & Grover, 1999; Toch, 2002; Woody, 2005).
In an empirical study measuring both operational and organizational stress in a sample of active-duty Canadian municipal police officers, Taylor and Bennell (2006) noted that previous research in this area has focused on officers’ perceptions of stress, rather than their actual experiences of stress. Of the surveys that do measure actual experiences, reports have been limited to specific types of stressors, rather than exploring all categories of police stress. Taylor and Bennell selected the Operational Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ-Op) and the Organizational Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ-Org) developed by McCreary (2004; as listed in Taylor & Bennell, 2006), to measure these two domains. Overall findings of this study indicated that officers rated organizational stressors significantly higher than operational stressors; however, the researchers noted the possibility of response bias in this group, given that the police culture discourages the communication of emotion related to trauma; thus, officers may not have felt safe in reporting stress related to the duties of their job. Other research studies comparing the impact of operational and organization stressors on officers have found opposite results (Brown, Fielding, & Grover, 1999; Karlsson & Christianson, 2003).

Stress, coping, and trauma

The concept of psychological stress can be defined as “…a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.21). Stress, appraisal and coping theory explains that the judgment that something is stressful depends on how the person construes the event and whether or not their method of coping, defined as the “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (1984, p. 141) can change the stressful event. Over time, repeated exposure to stressors can physically,
emotionally and psychologically exhaust the individual, and deplete the resources that are typically used to cope with the stress, a concept known as burnout (Pines & Aronson, 1988; as listed in Figley, 1998) or compassion fatigue (Figley, 1998). A traumatic event, in which an individual has “experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others” (DSM-IV-TR, 2000) can also overwhelm the ability to cope. Over the last forty years, the research literature on police stress has examined the various coping mechanisms of police officers, given that they routinely encounter organizational and operational stressors, and the less frequent exposure to critical incidents (Brown, Fielding, & Grover, 1999).

**Coping strategies of police officers**

**Problem-focused coping.**

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have described problem-focused coping as both the strategies used to change the impact of an external stressor, such as changing a policy in the workplace; and the strategies used to resolve an internal problem, such as engaging in physical exercise. In studies of operational stress and coping of police officers, common problem-focused coping strategies have included excessive alcohol consumption, social withdrawal, and suicide (Beehr, Johnson, & Nieva, 1995; Miller, 2007; Violanti, Fekedulegn, Charles, Andrew, Hartley, Mnatsakanova, & Burchfiel, 2009). A recent study found overall rates of police suicide across the United States to be four times higher than those of firefighters, another population that experiences routine operational stress (Violanti, 2009). Violanti et al. (2009) found depression to be highly correlated with suicidal ideation among police officers, an interesting finding given that as police officers begin their careers; they are assessed and deemed to be among some of the
most psychologically healthy working individuals (Karlsson & Christianson, 2003; Violanti et al., 2009).

**Emotion-focused coping.**

Emotion-focused coping is defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as the strategies used to decrease the level of emotion felt in reaction to a stressor, which can involve a cognitive reappraisal of the situation to alter its meaning for the individual. In a qualitative study linking training practices of police agencies with the development of traumatic stress, Rees and Smith (2008) argue that the absence of training to educate officers about the physiological, emotional, and vicarious effects of their work keeps them in a state of social isolation when attempting to cope with traumatic stress. They describe the police culture as one that discourages the open communication of emotions following trauma, treating those who do open up as weak and unable to cope. The nature of the work fosters a sense of camaraderie due to the unique, shared experiences, binding a group of officers together and isolating them from the community outside of policing, due to the development of feelings of suspiciousness and cynicism over time. Officers interviewed in the Rees and Smith study remarked that they were often unable to process the impact of a traumatic event, due to the requirement to move on to the next call, while others reported the need to pretend that they were not emotionally impacted during a call, while later experiencing intense feelings of sadness off-duty. Still others described the notion of installing mental barriers between themselves and the public to stop intruding thoughts and feelings from clouding their judgment; however, some realized that they did not remove the barrier upon their return home after a shift. Rees and Smith explain that individual efforts to suppress emotion following the experience of trauma, often for the purpose of self-preservation, can lead to dissociation. This process of constriction and emotionally numbing separates the
experience of trauma (Herman, 1997) from regular cognitive processes; thus preventing the traumatized individual from combining the emotions and thoughts required for healing to occur. Repressed emotion can lead the individual to experience difficulties in communicating within close relationships, leading to social isolation (Rees & Smith; Herman).

A phenomenological investigation of traumatic experiences in police work found that many of the memories of trauma resulted from incidents that occurred shortly after the individuals became police officers, with over 30% happening within the first five years of service, with the remaining reports of incidents occurring at least ten years prior (Karlsson & Christianson, 2003). Although several of the officers interviewed explained that they experienced other traumatic events later in their careers, the first experience remained the most vivid in their memories. Theories put forth by the researchers to explain why this may be the case include the notion of desensitization or an ability to distance oneself from the act of witnessing trauma over time; or the idea that police officers develop more effective coping strategies over the course of their careers, and become better able to integrate their thoughts and feelings following the experience of trauma. One of the aims of the current study is to further investigate these theories. The officers interviewed by Karlsson and Christianson expressed that the absence of preventive trauma training early in their careers led them to feel unprepared when faced with traumatic events; thus, recommendations from this study include the development of preventive training and support in order to mitigate the impact of traumatic experiences.

**Critical incident stress debriefing.**

In police organizations, informal social supports, such as going to the bar after a shift with co-workers, and formal social supports, as described in further detail here, have formed the basis for methods of coping with operational stress (Kirschman, 1997; Woody, 2005). Critical
Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), a technique created by Mitchell and Everly (1993; as cited in Tuckey, 2007), is a seven-step crisis intervention tool that incorporates peer support in its design. This group method of psychological debriefing was designed specifically for use with emergency responder groups, following their common experience of the same specific, traumatically stressful event that is beyond what one would normally experience on the job or in their personal life. It is noted that CISD should not be used on its own as a replacement for psychotherapy; rather, it must be used in conjunction with other critical incident stress management interventions such as follow-up and referral services, crisis assessment and strategic planning, and psychoeducational workshops prior to crisis (Mitchell, 2004).

Mitchell explains that CISD is not for use with primary victims in an individual, one-on-one single session format; it is designed for use with a homogenous group of professionals who work with primary victims. The purpose of this intervention is to provide temporary support to these workers following an extremely stressful event, in order to relieve some of the tension associated with their stress response, and focus on restoring their coping skills and ability to perform their job duties. It is also emphasized that CISD must be conducted by individuals with the appropriate training in using the CISD model, which typically involves a member of the peer support team at that organization as well as a mental health professional. The debriefing must be conducted according to the group process as outlined in the manual, and applied to the appropriate population in order for it to be an effective crisis intervention technique (Mitchell, 2004). In following the protocol for applying the CISD model, Mitchell claims that various organizations of emergency responders continue to use this technique, as they have found through the subjective responses of debriefing participants that it works, it fits with their
preference for working as a team to overcome crisis, and it maintains a sense of loyalty and trust among first responders.

Several criticisms of the CISD technique have emerged over the last two decades, which are summarized in a comprehensive review of the research examining the effectiveness of the technique (Tuckey, 2007). The review points out the fact that the criticisms to date regarding the effectiveness of CISD have been fraught with issues such as attempts to use it with individuals; the use of debriefing methods other than CISD; no baseline measures prior to the traumatic event (although these would be admittedly difficult to gather); the nature of the trauma experienced – research using victims of physical trauma as opposed to psychological; the timing of the debriefing – immediately after versus one to two weeks later; the lack of proper training of the CISD facilitators in the research studies; and the outcome measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The recommendations for future research on the efficacy of CISD include valid research of this specific group-debriefing model, while controlling for the above confounding factors (Tuckey, 2007). Other concerns that have been raised in the area of CISD, which have not yet been thoroughly researched, relate to debriefing participants feeling safe to discuss their experience of the event; individuals being directed to attend debriefings by their employers, which may remove their sense of control in an already stressful situation; and the potential for stigmatization if an individual avoids sharing their thoughts and feelings during a debriefing session (Litz, Gray, Bryant, & Adler, 2002).

In a study specifically investigating the use of CISD with police officers, the researchers have noted that if the challenges in CISD research are addressed, such as clarifying the terminology, and ensuring that the training of the facilitators and the delivery of the intervention are both standardized, then the benefits of CISD may be realized (Malcolm, Seaton, Perera,
Sheehan, & Van Hasselt, 2005). Based on their review of the existing research literature using CISD with law enforcement personnel, the investigators found some support in its use with this population. Similar to Tuckey and Litz et al., Malcolm et al. highlight the clear need for further, empirically based research in the area of CISD.

**Social support as stress buffer.**

Due to feelings of helplessness in being unable to prevent a trauma from happening, individuals doubt their abilities and often experience a sense of shame and guilt (Herman, 1997), creating both a desire to isolate themselves, while simultaneously feeling a need to connect with others. Herman explains that supportive and caring behaviours of significant others, including listening to the experiences of the individual, acknowledging the trauma and accepting the person without judgment, contribute to the recovery from trauma. In a study investigating the effects of both emotion-focused and behaviour-focused coping and social support on the level of stress in police officers, Patterson (2003) found that the act of seeking social support to manage emotional responses decreased levels of operational stress, while seeking support to manage the situation and resolve the problem actually increased levels of distress, leading to the notion that perhaps emotion-focused coping strategies are more effective for officers experiencing operational stress; thus, further police training in using such strategies could be beneficial. Patterson also found that years of officer experience and higher ranks were associated with fewer reports of stress.

In an investigation of communication patterns among police officers and their superiors, researchers noted that it is not simply the act of speaking to another about a traumatic experience, but rather, the outcome of the conversation – the positive or negative reactions of the other to communication about emotions – that determines the impact of the trauma on the
individual (Stephens & Long, 2000), as well as the source of social support. The researchers found that positive communication with peers decreased psychological and physiological trauma symptoms in the individual; however, positive communication with supervisors showed no significant effect, lending support to the idea that in times of stress, those closest to the individual may be the best source of support. In addition to social support in the workplace, the family system can also provide support to the officer; however, there is the potential for the effects of operational stress to extend to the spouse and other family members.

**Work-family conflict**

In a survey study exploring the effects of police work stress on the family, researchers found that higher scores on a measure of officer burnout were linked to low scores on a measure of family life quality, and corresponded with female spouses’ reports of their husbands’ negative mood, and lack of involvement in family matters and social activities (Jackson & Maslach, 1982). A survey conducted in the United Kingdom of 400 police spouses found similar results (Alexander & Walker, 1996). Approximately 25% of spouses indicated that their partners experienced significant work-related stress within the previous month, while approximately 65% of spouses perceived their partners’ work stress as having a negative impact on them, and the marital relationship. Given that there is quantitative evidence of this phenomenon, the current study extends this knowledge by gaining a deeper understanding of spouses’ perceptions of how this process occurs.

The effects of external stressors on the family system were also explored in recent research via the use of behavioural observations, self-report measures, and participant journals (Repetti, Wang, & Saxbe, 2009). The findings indicated that when observations and reports were made of stressful experiences in the workplace, there was less social interaction and
communication of feelings among family members in the home later in the day, and greater expressions of annoyance towards others from the individual who experienced the work stress. This supports the notion that behaviours in the family system are affected by at least one individual experiencing external stress during the workday. The phrase “crossover” is used by Repetti et al. to describe this phenomenon, which is interchangeable with the term “spillover” used by others to describe the impact of external stressors on families. The authors point out that although these behavioural changes were observed in a short time frame, the potential exists for the effects to be experienced by the family over an extended period if daily stressors build up.

**Trauma transmission and spousal stress.**

Family burnout, defined as “the ultimate fatigue of intimate relationships…associated with devotion to various family relationships that failed to produce the expected rewards.” (Figley, 1998, p. 5) can be used to conceptualize the work-family conflict that occurs within some police families. Figley developed the Trauma Transmission Model to describe the burnout process, where individuals within the family system express empathy towards the individual experiencing traumatic stress, and seek to answer questions related to the trauma, which is normally a task engaged in only by the primary victim (Figley, 1998). In doing so, emotional contagion occurs (Larson & Almeida, 1999), and family members may begin to experience the same emotions as the traumatized individual while attempting to provide support and help them heal.

The spouse of a police officer may develop secondary traumatic stress as a result of his or her efforts to connect emotionally with and understand the experiences of their traumatized partner (Miller, 2007). Miller describes the dynamics that can lead to distress in the spouse of an officer, including feelings of exclusion that can result in jealousy and bitterness towards the
police organization, due to the strong sense of camaraderie and commitment to work among officers, at the expense of time spent with their families. Verbal accounts from police spouses illustrate the stress they feel when questioned and treated like a criminal by their partner, making them feel as though they cannot be trusted (Kirschman, 1997).

When the officer does disclose a trauma that they have experienced on the job, spouses may feel a sense of guilt in not being able to protect their partner, and not knowing how to emotionally support them (Kirschman, 1997). Isolation is also a common feeling among spouses of traumatized individuals; they may fear they are not needed, while their partners are preoccupied with their own thoughts following the traumatic event (Johnson & Williams-Keeler, 1998). Feelings of shame associated with the sense that one should be able to better handle the stress can result in the desire of the spouse to socially isolate himself or herself from friends and extended family, unfortunately leading to greater distress in the marriage due to a lack of social support (Johnson & Williams-Keeler, 1998). In addition to the above-mentioned impacts of trauma on spouses, if children are present in the family, the spouse is often faced with the full responsibility of childcare while his or her partner copes with their own traumatic reactions (Galovski & Lyons, 2004; Kirschman, 1997). Although there is limited research pertaining to spousal coping strategies, quantitative research has indicated that spouses who experience secondary traumatic stress report experiences of anxiety and social isolation, feelings of depression and loneliness (Galovski & Lyons, 2004). The current study explores the ways in which police couples cope with the spillover of workplace stressors in their marital relationship, in order to expand the current knowledge of strategies used to mitigate the impacts of stress on the spouse and family system.
Stress and the marital relationship.

Given the number of studies showing evidence in support of the concept of transmission or spillover of stress from one spouse or family member to another, researchers are now engaged in a dialogue to address whether romantic partners experience stress solely as individuals, arriving at their own independent judgments of the stressor and how their partner is coping with it; or is the experience of the stressor shared between the two partners, with a subsequent coping response developed jointly in the dyad (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009). Three factors must be taken into account by those investigating the issue of relational stress, including the origin, nature, and duration of the stressor – whether it originated outside of the relationship, or within the interactions of the couple; is it a significant event in the life of the couple such as the loss of a loved one, or is it arising from daily activities such as commuting to work; and is it short in duration, perhaps only occurring once, or is it a recurring stressor over an extended period of time (Randall & Bodenmann). Knowledge of the context of stress in a marital relationship can be of great assistance to clinical counsellors and other resources of support who may be working with the couple, as interventions can then be tailored to fit the unique needs and skills of the partners in managing a particular stressor effectively. This is the fundamental basis for the current study, as it is through a detailed understanding of the specific stressors, perceived impacts, and coping strategies used within the relationship that will provide the necessary insight for the development of new resources and supports for police families.

Dyadic functioning was explored recently in couples where one individual or both had experienced a past trauma (Blalock Henry et al., 2011). Using interview data from each partner, the researchers explored the perceived impact of the traumatic event on the functioning of the couple, and on each as individuals. Of the mechanisms used within the relationship, the
researchers found that the trauma survivors received emotional support from their partners via their partner’s willingness to listen and respond empathically. Practical support, which involved the partner taking over some of the daily tasks in the relationship in order to alleviate stress for the trauma survivor was also found to be a common theme.

**Relational coping strategies in the marriage.**

Jackson and Maslach (1982) found that in police marriages experiencing the spillover effect of work stress to the home environment, partners had different individual coping styles, in which male officers used behaviour-focused coping such as drinking or other avoidance strategies, while the female spouses engaged in emotion-focused coping activities such as confiding in their husband or a friend, or seeking support from other police spouses. In an examination of the effects of work-related stress versus physical exhaustion on the marital relationships of police couples, Roberts and Levenson (2001) observed the interactions between husbands and wives, and found that officers’ reports of work stress related to maladaptive coping strategies in both partners, including decreased positive emotions and increased negative emotions in communication patterns, as well as increased emotional distancing. Over the last two decades, the literature on stress and coping in marital relationships has been evolving from a perspective of coping strategies as individually-based only, to a perspective that considers the connection of the individuals within the relationship (Byrd O’Brien, DeLongis, Pomaki, Puterman, and Zwicker, 2009), and the potential for the couple to engage in a joint coping strategy to address various types of stressors (Bodenmann, 2005).

**Dyadic coping theory.**

The term dyadic stress is defined by Bodenmann (2005) as a “specific stressful encounter
that affects both partners either directly or indirectly” is somewhat similar; however, the
definition goes further, indicating that it “triggers the coping efforts of both partners within a
defined time frame and a defined geographic location” (p.33); thus, it always involves both
individuals in the relationship. Bodenmann explains that dyadic stress is direct or indirect for the
partners involved, external or internal to the relationship, and simultaneous or sequential in
nature, where both individuals may experience the stressor at the same time, or one may
experience it later than the other. An external stressor experienced by one partner has the
potential to affect the other partner indirectly, when the stress is not coped with by the first
person prior to the couple reuniting. In this case, the second partner experiences the stress
through the ‘spillover’ effect, or by noticing a need to respond to the stress signals of the first.
Alternatively, the same stressor, such as the death of a loved one, may directly impact the two
individuals in the relationship.

Bodenmann explains that dyadic coping can be positive or negative in nature, and can
take on one of several forms. Positive supportive dyadic coping consists of providing support to
one’s partner, for the purpose of helping them to manage a specific stressor. Included in this
category are strategies such as empathizing with the feelings and thoughts expressed by the
other, and assisting them in working through the stress cognitively. Bodenmann points out that
this type of support is not just for the purpose of reducing the other partner’s stress; rather, it is
an approach used by spouses to decrease their own stress in the relationship.

Common dyadic coping is another category of positive coping, in which the couple works
together with equal involvement, and focuses on the joint activities used to manage a common
stressor. Strategies of common dyadic coping are problem-focused or emotion-focused, and
might include sharing thoughts and feelings about the stress, or engaging in an activity in order
to spend time with one another and relax. Delegated dyadic coping, the third category of positive coping within a couple, is described as a mechanism in which one partner requests assistance from the other for completion of tasks, with the goal of decreasing the stress levels experienced. An example of delegated coping might involve one partner taking over responsibility from the other partner for paying bills and managing the couple’s finances.

Dyadic coping theory is a key theoretical framework for the current study, in which both the individual and relational coping strategies of the couple will be explored with each participant. The ability of a marital relationship to withstand and recover from the impact of stress relates to stress and coping theory, and how the couple assesses their ability to cope with the stressor (Patterson, 2002). A focus on the strengths within the relationship, and an emphasis on working towards solutions rather than causes of the problem can assist the couple to identify the resources that will get them through a crisis (Walsh, 2002). In the current study, it is anticipated that new insights will be gained regarding how these police couples have maintained their marriages over the years.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study seeks to answer the following main research question: What is the experience of being married to a police officer who encounters operational stress in the workplace? Secondary research questions that I intend to address include: What individual and relational coping strategies are used to address stress within the marital relationship? How does the spouse perceive himself or herself to be impacted by the operational stress and coping strategies of their partner? Is there a perceived change in the impact on the marital relationship and the use of relational coping strategies over the course of the policing career? As we do not yet know enough about police spouses’ experiences of their marital relationships, an exploratory study will provide a rich portrayal of their experience of operational stress and its perceived impact on the police marriage.

Research design

Overview and rationale.

I conducted a narrative study using the Life Story interview method (Atkinson, 1993; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), as it is through storytelling that one creates their own identity and reality, and can understand others (Atkinson, 1993; Kvale, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1995). This approach consists of a semi-structured interview, followed by a thematic analysis of the narratives to identify patterns within and across the participants’ stories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I selected the Life Story interview method, as “stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively or negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes” (Polkinghorne, 1995). It enables an in-depth understanding of the meaning that police spouses attribute to their experiences within the
marital relationship, and uses a temporal framework (Atkinson, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1995) to provide a developmental perspective of police marriages.

**Participants**

The participants in this study are eight female civilian spouses of male police officers working within the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley regions of British Columbia. The criteria for participation in this study included the following: (1) participants must be married to, or have previously been married to a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) or municipal police service member for at least one year; (2) the police member must be a full-time, active-duty, sworn service member at the commencement of the study; (3) the police member must have identified to their spouse at least one experience of operational stress while on the job; (4) the spouse must never have been a police member themselves. Fluency in English was a requirement for participation, given the limited resources available for transcribing the interviews. The following are brief background descriptions of each woman that participated, including information about her partner. Pseudonyms were used for the purpose of maintaining anonymity amongst the participants.

**Melissa.**

Melissa and Kevin have been together as a couple for 19 years, and married for 17; neither of them was married previously. Melissa is 44 years of age, and Kevin is 47. The couple has three children, each 2 years apart. Kevin has been serving as a constable of a municipal police department for 12 years, and Melissa is a clinical counsellor and consultant. Melissa and Kevin were married prior to Kevin becoming a police officer.
Cathy.

Cathy, 41, and Steve, 38, have been together as a couple for 17 years, and married for 15. Neither of them was married previously, and they got married prior to Steve becoming a police officer. Cathy has two adult children from a previous relationship. Steve has been serving as a constable with the RCMP for two and a half years, and Cathy is a family counsellor.

Joan.

Joan and Jack met in high school, and have been together for 36 years, and married for 31 years. They are both 53 years old, and have one child. They got married immediately prior to Jack becoming a police officer with a municipal department. Jack has worked as a police constable for the past 31 years at two different departments over the course of his career, and specialized in traffic reconstruction. Joan works full-time as a city employee, interacting with individuals and families from the community. Shortly after the follow-up interview for this research project, Jack retired from policing.

Pauline.

Pauline and Ryan have been together for 20 years, and married for 17. Pauline is 42 years of age, and Ryan is 41. It is the first marriage for both of them, and they have one child. They got married prior to Ryan becoming a police officer with a municipal department. Ryan has worked as a police member for 10 years; he is a detective and currently holds the position of Acting Sergeant. Pauline is completing her Master of Arts.

Tamara.

Tamara, 32, and Neil, 33, have been together as a couple for eight years, and married for three and a half years; neither of them was married previously. Neil has been serving as a constable with the RCMP for the past six years, and Tamara is a civilian employee of a
municipal police department. They are expecting their first child later this year. They became a
couple prior to Neil pursuing a career in policing, and got married following Neil’s training at
the RCMP depot.

Karen.

Karen, 43, and Brett, 39, have been together as a couple for 21 years, and married for 19.
This is Karen’s second marriage. Brett is a seven-year member of a municipal police
department, and Karen works full-time in an administrative role for a non-profit organization.
They have two children, and were married prior to Brett becoming a police officer.

Lisa.

Lisa, 37, and Lyle, 39, have been together as a couple for almost 13 years, and married
for seven years; neither of them was married previously. Lyle has been serving as a member of a
municipal police department for 17 years, and currently holds the rank of sergeant. Lisa works
as a civilian employee at a different police department. They got married after Lyle became a
police officer, and they have one child together.

Michelle.

Michelle, 44, and James, 48, met in their late teens when they worked together at a fast-
food restaurant. They have been together as a couple for 28 years, and married for 27. James
was an auxiliary police member when they were dating, and has been serving as a full-time
sworn member for 26 years. Currently, he is a sergeant within a municipal police department.
Michelle works full-time as a manager within the financial industry. The couple has two adult
sons.

Recruitment

Spouses of officers from various ranks of policing were recruited, as operational stress
may be experienced at any point in the policing career. Participants were recruited using two strategies. I used a snowball sampling procedure using my own contacts and those of an RCMP psychologist to assist in the recruitment process. A number of police members contacted me directly to express that their spouse was interested participating. In these cases, I would provide information about the study to the officer, answer any questions they had, and requested that their spouse contact me directly to confirm her interest. All individuals who expressed an interest in participating contacted me by phone or e-mail, and I provided them with an overview of the study. I asked them specific questions to determine their eligibility for participation, and if they met the criteria, they were formally invited to take part in the study. I provided both the letter of invitation and the letter of informed consent by e-mail for each participant to review, and I reviewed the informed consent in-person with each participant at the first meeting. An honorarium of $20 was provided to each participant to reimburse for the costs such as parking, mileage, or alternate transportation to attend the interview.

Data collection

Once I developed an interview guide and suggested questions, I piloted the interview process with two police spouses to determine the level of clarity and flow of the questions, and the type of information that might be generated. Through this process, I clarified the wording of one question that was not clear; otherwise, the information provided by these two spouses fit with what I expected, and I felt comfortable with using the interview protocol.

Following recruitment of the participants, I secured the use of private meeting rooms within community libraries in order to conduct three of the interviews. Two interviews were held in the homes of the participants for their convenience, comfort, and confidentiality. The
remaining three interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms at the workplaces of the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate my review of the data collection.

Interviews began with me reviewing the informed consent and discussing it with each participant. Demographic information was then collected, including their age, their current employment status, the age of their partner, the duration of their relationship with their partner, their marital status with their partner (e.g. first or second marriage, or divorced), whether they were married before or after their spouse became a police officer, the ages and number of children that the couple may have, and the length of time their partner has been serving as a police member. I also asked for the rank of the officer, and whether he belongs to a municipal police service or the RCMP. I shared with the participants my interest in conducting research on this topic, my positioning within the research context, and a brief description of the Life Story interview method.

I first conducted one two-hour interview with each participant. To assist participants in preparing to tell their story, I asked them to reflect on their life with their spouse, and draw a lifeline or develop titles for the different chapters of their life together, from the beginning of first meeting him, to getting married and settling in, through to the present (Atkinson, 1993). I asked the participant questions that pertained to each point they introduced, to allow them to tell their story of each stage of their relationship with their partner. Upon completion of each interview, I requested that the participant journal and/or voice any further thoughts regarding the interview process and their experiences, or to record any additional information to their story, prior to my follow-up with them. I also let each participant know that they could contact me prior to our next scheduled meeting should any questions or concerns arise regarding their participation in the study.
Data analysis

Transcription and creation of narrative summaries.

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by me. I engaged in memoing to reflect on my initial feelings about and reactions to each interview and story, the context in which each participant meeting was held, such as the set-up of the room or any interruptions that occurred during the interview that may have influenced the interaction between myself and the participants, as well as any patterns developing in my mind as I started reviewing the multiple stories.

Once I completed the transcription process, I contacted each participant by e-mail or phone to arrange for a follow-up interview to clarify any questions that arose for me in the transcription process, and to offer the women an opportunity to add any information that they had not considered previously. Three of the follow-up interviews were completed in-person, and were approximately 45 minutes to an hour in duration. The other follow-up interviews were completed via e-mail for the convenience of the participant, and to manage scheduling conflicts. Once the follow-up process was complete, I transcribed the additional information to the first transcript.

There were no journal entries or audio-recordings provided by the participants. In the transcription process, I removed my questions and comments and transcribed them in a separate document, in order to allow the narrative of the participant to flow (Atkinson, 1993). I started my analysis by first reading, then re-reading each transcript while simultaneously listening to the audio recording in order to become familiar with the stories and capture any emphasis on words or other sounds that could lead to further interpretation. I then created narrative summaries from each of the transcripts, which involved developing the transcript into a story format by placing
parts of the story into sequence, and combining information where the same topic was addressed, as well as removing parts of the story that I assessed as being unrelated to the overall focus of the project.

I made the decision to keep the narratives in the voices of the participants, and avoided altering their words, while removing filler words such as “um” or “ah” to allow the narrative to flow more smoothly. As part of my preparation for creating the narratives, I reviewed several other narrative studies in order to get a sense of the creation of the story. Once I started the process myself of removing parts that I deemed to be unrelated to the overall focus, I noticed my feeling of reluctance, as there is much in the way that these women told their stories that provides context and personality, such as their phrasing, the use of humour, and offering a bit of background information to a topic. If read in isolation, many of the statements could be viewed as irrelevant to the research question; however, I found that these statements provided further meaning to their responses regarding the interview questions. I decided to avoid removing large amounts of information from each story; thus, due to their length, the stories appear in their entirety in the appendix of this paper, while the results section includes several excerpts to highlight the themes developed through the thematic analysis process.

Thematic analysis.

Once each story was in its final format following the participants’ reviews, I realized that the amount of data I had would be quite difficult to code manually. I chose to use a qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo 9 (QSR International, 2010), to assist me with the coding process. I selected this program based on the fact that I had recently received training with the software, and found it to be quite user-friendly, with several resources for help if required. I imported each narrative summary into the program, and began the process of inductive coding –
creating codes as I moved through the stories to identify different concepts, with the categories of codes reflecting the interview questions, such as perceived impacts, coping strategies of officer, coping strategies of spouse, and coping strategies of couple. Once each story was coded, I began the thematic analysis process by reviewing the codes and their descriptions, and combining them based on similarities, such as problem-focused coping of officers; perceived impacts of policing on daily life of couple; communication strategies of the couple. With the assistance of NVivo, I was able to identify easily the frequency with which each code occurred among the data. Although this frequency influenced my decision-making in relation to which codes became themes or subthemes, those decisions were also influenced by the codes that I judged to be particularly salient to the research questions, regardless of the number of participants making reference to them. I referred to my reflections during the interview process to make some of these judgments, noting the instances where I was particularly struck by a statement made in one of the interviews.

**Data trustworthiness.**

Once I completed a narrative summary for each participant, I contacted her by e-mail with the attached summary, and requested that she review it and indicate any changes that she would like to make, as I wanted to ensure that each woman was comfortable with all of the information in their stories. During this phase, several of the women did request adaptations or deletions of small amounts of information to enhance their anonymity, knowing that there is a risk potentially of being identified by others with whom they or their partner are closely connected. Others requested changes to the specific wording of some sentences for the purpose of readability. Following my analysis and interpretation of each narrative, I consulted with my research supervisor, an expert in the field of narrative research, and an independent peer reviewer.
with knowledge of the police culture to review my findings and determine if they make sense, given the content of the stories. The peer reviewer commented that the themes, subthemes, and related excerpts made sense, and were consistent with their experience and knowledge of the police culture and operational stress.

**Presentation of the findings**

The narrative summaries and the themes developed through the data analysis process are presented in the following sections of this study. I plan to write a journal article that reflects this research process and its findings, and submit it for publishing in a peer-reviewed academic journal. I also plan to submit my research to relevant upcoming conferences, and I intend to share the findings of this study with any interested parties, including but not limited to the police management officials at the various RCMP detachments and municipal police departments, and the recruitment and training officials at the Justice Institute of British Columbia.

**Ethical considerations**

I provided all potential participants with a concise and detailed overview of the research project, in order to ensure that they were informed with regards to the expectations of their involvement in the research study. I also informed them of their rights as participants, such as the right to confidentiality and anonymity, and the right to withdraw their participation from the study at any time and for any reason. Given the sensitivity of the information shared by participants and the potential for participants’ emotional reactions during and following the interview, I provided each participant with a list of resources for information and counselling following the informed consent process, and prior to beginning the interview. I was aware that a range of emotions could arise for participants throughout the interview process, and they could become overwhelmed at times as a result of sharing their story. The interview could bring up
topics never discussed previously by the participant; therefore, I also informed them that, if they wished, we could stop the interview at any time, and take a break prior to continuing, or reschedule for a later date if they preferred. One participant did express sadness and became teary at a few different points while sharing parts of her story. I indicated to her that we could take a break if needed, and that she could take her time in sharing her thoughts. She paused momentarily and chose to continue with her story. We did break for coffee later in the interview, which appeared to assist her in staying grounded and avoiding feeling overwhelmed.

Given my role as a volunteer and auxiliary victim services caseworker within a municipal police department, I screened participants for any potential conflict of interest during the recruitment phase. In doing so, I confirmed that their police officer spouse did not work at the same department as I, was not known to me, and I had not worked with him previously. As I had participated previously in a special project with an RCMP investigative unit, I also screened to ensure that I did not recruit any of those members’ spouses.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of the experience of being married to a police officer who encounters operational stress, and to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of civilian spouses regarding the impact of police work on the marital relationship, and the individual and relational coping strategies used within the marriage to cope with operational stress. Excerpts from the stories of each of the eight women are used to illustrate the nine themes and 18 subthemes that were created through thematic analysis. The qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo 9, assisted in combining the large amount of rich data into meaningful constructs.

Policing as a lifestyle versus policing as just a job.

This theme captures the apparent dichotomy among the spouses’ perceptions of the policing career and its impact on the officer and the marital relationship. Relevant subthemes were created from descriptions of some of these perceived impacts.

Hypervigilance.

Defined as the arousal of the nervous system and heightened awareness of one’s surroundings and of potential threats to the physical safety of the self and others, this subtheme was described by four of the eight women. The spouses described their husbands’ concerns for the safety of the family, how the officer educates the family about dangerous circumstances they could encounter, and the precautionary measures that they can take to minimize the risk. They also explained the hypervigilance of their partners when out in the community, such as having their back against a wall so that they have a clear view of the door. It appears that this preparation and situational awareness – as Melissa described it – is encouraged in the family as a whole, and has an impact on the experience of their life together.
He has got hand signals with our kids, which I did not know. If something bad is happening and he wants them to come to him, he will tap the top of his head. He has got another signal for ‘stay away from me’. They do not really think or talk about it, they just do it! They all know how to phone the right number and say, ‘my dad’s wearing this, he’s an off-duty cop…’ We do a lot of ‘what-if’ stuff; we have all got the little drill. I think he feels a heightened responsibility with his work… We have an ever-present sense of security; it is part of who we are now. ~ Melissa

We cannot really go anywhere because he knows where all the good and bad people are, and it is his working area, which is not good. If we have to go shopping, we go in, get the job done, and get out as fast as we can. ~ Cathy

I notice he is very paranoid. It is understandable, since all he sees is badness…He worries about me and the boys, and there are certain places that I am not allowed to go… I like to run, and Brett does not want me to go running by myself. I say, ‘pretty soon you’re going to have me running laps around the house!’ He is constantly watching, and aware of his surroundings. When we got to a restaurant, he has his ‘tactical seat’, where his back can be against the wall and he is able to see the doors. We even have it in our own house! He scans the room, sees who is there, and if he spots people that look kind of iffy, he has a description of them. ~ Karen

I think our son’s life, whether he realizes it or not, is going to be wrapped in blue…One of the big reasons we chose the school that he goes to was the quality of people that go there, in the hopes that he would not end up in a situation where his best friend is some crackhead’s son…The things we can control, we attempt to control as much as possible with way too much information. Our life is one big, cautionary note…It is the concern of the driving, where we are parking, how I am walking to and from the store, what is in my car when I leave it, where I leave it, is it locked. ~ Lisa

*Never off-duty.*

This subtheme was created to describe the spouse’s perception that her husband is always an officer. Even when technically off-duty, many of the women described their partner as never really being off because he answers questions about policing, carries his badge at all times, and always has work on his mind. Three of the women provided explanations of how neighbours treat the family differently, and will approach them in the community to ask police-related questions.

Everybody in the neighbourhood comes to our house if something goes wrong. His job does not turn off, it is always on, but I am okay with that. It is not so invasive in everyday life. ~ Melissa
Neighbours come up and ask, ‘how do we deal with this?’ Co-workers do the same thing, and I say, ‘don’t talk to me about my husband. Talk about me! Ask me how my day is going!’ Steve says he is never really off-duty, especially being an RCMP member; he is on all the time. I thought that was a weird concept, but that is just the way it is.

~ Cathy

He has to carry a badge at all times in Canada and the United States, and has to identify himself as a police officer, so he is always on the job. ~ Lisa

It is like work rents space in his head…We spend a lot time talking about what he does; it takes up a lot of space. Hearing it does get taxing at times. I could teach a course on it!

~ Melissa

**Taking a backseat.**

Some of the spouses characterized the understanding that exists between them and their husbands that police duties take priority, and that the spouse and family members often need to make sacrifices and adjustments to their own plans in order to accommodate the work schedule of the officer. Two of the spouses described different points in their husband’s career where the work did take priority for awhile. When he changed positions in the department, their priorities as a family changed as well.

You have to adjust everything, including holidays and family time…it is a lifestyle, you know what you are getting into, and unfortunately you have to take a backseat to his life. Some women just do not want to live their lives around the RCMP, and you have to do that. It is a huge adjustment, and it involves putting your ego in check. ~ Tamara

The phone was ringing all the time in the middle of the night. At first you think, ‘ah! Something is going on! What’s happening?’ After awhile, it is more like, ‘what now? Just a minute, he’s right here.’ That was a really stressful time, it was hard for both of us, and it interrupted a lot of family time. When he was able to move back out of that, it was really great. ~ Michelle

I was always blaming bad guys for wrecking our life. We would have plans or the kids would have a sports day, and he could not make it. So I tried not to tell them anytime he was coming, so that if he showed up, it would be like, ‘oh! Look!’ Rather than, ‘oh, he can’t come now.’ The constant unpredictable circumstances were a drag. ~ Melissa

I am the primary caregiver, my whole life is this, and 99 percent of the time I am in charge of our son. He is too, but only when he can be. So if he gets pulled out of it, or our son has a sick day, I have to stay home, as opposed to him, because basically, he has got the more important job. ~ Lisa
**Flexibility for family time.**

This subtheme lends support to the perception of policing as just a job. Several of the spouses explained the positive aspects of shiftwork and the four-days-on, four-days-off work weeks. They described this work schedule as allowing the family to spend quality time together, and for the officer to be more involved in parenting, for example.

He became a detective when our son was six months old. So he went into sex crimes at that point, and it was better shifts. He worked days and had some great partners.

~ Pauline

I thought about quitting to stay home…He loved being home on his four days off with her [daughter], and it worked out really well. 

~ Joan

As the boys got a little bit older, James was able to move into a position as the school liaison officer. By then, the boys were in school full time, which worked out great…We are very focused on our kids; we have never missed a game. Our son is now playing at university, and that is still a priority. We get to all the kids’ games, and I think that is a big stress reliever for James.

~ Michelle

The shiftwork, again, I cannot put it down. It allows opportunities for four days off every week. Sometimes I get three days off, so if our days coordinate, then I can just take an extra day and we can go camping. We do not like crowds, so it was nice to create our own long weekends.

~ Joan

**Friends outside of policing.**

The importance of the couple maintaining friendships outside of the policing community is highlighted by some of the women as a means of finding a balance and staying grounded with their own values beyond those of the police force. Interestingly, other spouses explained that their partner’s friends all tend to be from within the policing community since they can relate to the unique challenges of being a police family, and understand and trust each other. The camaraderie, or having friends within the policing environment, is explored further under the main theme of social support.
When we were married less than ten years, we met a couple that became really good mentors for us. We met them at church, and he really helped James to see, as a man, this is what you need to be a good role model for your family; this is how to be a good husband and a good father. I think back now, and I think that was really important, because of the type of person that policing attracts. ~ Michelle

We just came back from holidays and we went with another couple that we met through a police friend, who are not police members themselves. That was our first foray into a non-policing adventure, but we have known them for a little while and they are good people, so it worked out well!...These people have never been police officers, and do not have a family member who is a police officer. I think it opened Lyle’s eyes to the fact that there are people out there that you can spend time with, who are good people! ~ Lisa

The dichotomy of policing as a lifestyle versus policing as just a job is evident within and across the stories of these women. Their descriptions of the perceived impacts of policing on their marital relationship and family provide evidence of the unique aspects of the career that can certainly spillover and affect daily life for the couple; however, these spouses also provided explanations of factors, such as flexibility in scheduling and having non-police friendships, that appear to assist them in maintaining a balanced perspective in their life together that is not solely focused on the policing career.

**The value of social support.**

All of the women described the value of having close others supporting them as a couple and as individuals, including siblings, parents, co-workers, friends from the police department, and friends unrelated to policing, as described under the previous theme. These spouses acknowledged that their networks of social support have helped them to cope with challenging circumstances throughout their marital relationship that could have an impact on any couple, regardless of whether one spouse is a police officer. Such circumstances, as described in these women’s stories, include infertility; the death or illness of a parent, relative, or friend; infidelity; financial stress; and being on the verge of divorce. In addition, these social supports have assisted them in coping with the distinct stressors that arise from the officer’s work duties and
that have a perceived impact on the couple’s relationship, such as the experience of Michelle and James in coping with stress in the family as a result of James’ strep infection.

**Social support from family.**

Interestingly, five of the eight women reported that at some point in their relationship, they have lived as a couple with parents or siblings for an extended period of time. The women described receiving help from family members in taking care of the household duties and children, having someone to listen and talk to about things going on, having parents or siblings who are supportive of the officer’s work, and having support from siblings in taking care of parents who are aging or ill.

When they [parents] were diagnosed, my brother was living in the Queen Charlottes at the time. He decided to move down, and we said, ‘well, why don’t we buy a house together?’ So we set up here, and he came down to help look after Mom and Dad, and lived with us for six or seven years, it was really nice. ~ Joan

I have a thing about constantly communicating. That was new to him, but that is the way my family works. I talk to my siblings all the time every day; it is just the way we are. ~ Melissa

I was not afraid to ask for help, so I got Ryan’s mom for babysitting, and I got babysitters, and my stepdad came out one weekend, and my mom came out another weekend. So I made sure that I tried to do as much for me as I could. ~ Pauline

The day-to-day…I look back and I think, ‘ugh, my god, how did I do that?’ My mom came out for a week and she took care of the home front. She said, ‘there is no clean laundry!’ That one week she was there was the only time that we had a home-cooked meal. Then she went home, and James was in intensive care for six weeks, and I did not eat another [home-cooked] meal until he came home from the hospital! ~ Michelle

**Social support from co-workers.**

This subtheme refers to the women’s connections with their own co-workers as a source of support in helping them to get through difficult and stressful times. Half of the spouses mentioned their relationships with co-workers, and described them as beneficial. In particular,
Michelle and Cathy each provided examples of receiving emotional support from co-workers during periods in their marriage where their partner was required to be away from the home.

I have a good network of people that I have worked with for the last 20 years. When James was in the hospital, I remember saying to one of my co-workers at the time that I now know why people go off on stress leave. Everyone at my office was really supportive, and it helped me to still come to work every day. It was probably not the smartest thing to do, but you just do what you can do to get through it. ~ Michelle

I talk to my co-workers, because they are always checking in...They were there with me when Steve was going through depot, saying, ‘he’s going to be a cop! Do you know how stressful that is?’ I said, ‘I think I know’, but I did not have any idea. No matter how much you hear or read, you do not know until you experience it. My co-workers were very supportive during the six months he was gone, when he was working in [name of city], and happily relieved when he was finally back here. ~ Cathy

Camaraderie.

Defined as a sense of trust and companionship among individuals, this subtheme is described by each of the women. They explained that it is through shared experiences with other police families that this sense of togetherness builds. Karen and Melissa both spoke of camaraderie in planning for a worst-case scenario – if their husband was killed while on-duty – and the comfort of knowing that support would be available to them.

We have a plan for if something goes really bad. If Kevin was killed on-duty, I know what would happen next and what I would do. I even chose who would come to my house to tell me the bad news, and they actually have it on file somewhere. If this one guy shows up later at night, I will know what is going on. I also hope that the guys on his shift would give me the heads up. ~ Melissa

We have made a pact that if one of us ever got that knock on the door, we would all be there for each other in a second. It is comforting to know that you have somebody that you can call to come stay with your kids, or just to cry with, you have that support. ~ Karen

Lisa noted the way in which her husband Lyle and fellow officers insulate themselves as a group from those not related to policing, since they trust each other, and “trust that what happens is all going to be legal and on the level” to protect themselves from public scrutiny. The
spouses perceive that the sense of trust that many officers have with each other is unique in that they are faced with life-or-death situations and need to feel like they can rely on one another for safety while on patrol; thus, they develop a strong bond over time.

We have adapted our friends around the job, because we are all in the same boat, we all get it. ~ Tamara

Having a relationship with Brett’s co-workers and not just their spouse is important. Then it is more of a personal connection, and then I know that they are protecting him, they have got his back. It is like you almost become part of their family as well. ~ Karen

If I am stressed, I am trying to talk to Kevin and do not feel like I am getting anywhere, I will phone up a couple of his friends. So whom can you call on? To realize it does not have to be me; I just need to find ways to get him support – someone who knows the job and the person. ~ Melissa

He has some work friends that he gets a chance to share with, and I would say not too lavishly, but they sort of emote in the male cop way that is appropriate, so he can do that. A lot of them work together, so he gets together with a couple of guys. The other thing is, male cops are like old Italian women gossiping…Again, I just find that funny, that is what they need to do…Is anyone else going to get it? So it ends up being directed internally. ~ Pauline

The sense of camaraderie that develops among police members and their families offers a sense of comfort to several of these spouses. The bond that exists among officers is described as important and necessary in relation to carrying out the duties of policing; however, it can be viewed as detrimental if it becomes the member’s primary source of social support, thus taking away from his emotional connection to his own family. The spouses described in-depth other various coping strategies that they perceive their partners to use for operational stress.

**Lessening the emotional impact through detachment and humour.**

The majority of the spouses explained their observations of the strategies that their husbands use to cope with the emotional aspect of police work, when there is the potential for the emotional impact to accumulate over the course of the officer’s career. Half of the spouses described incidents in which their husband responded to a call involving death or serious injury
of a child or children, and explained that their partners expressed that these are the most difficult calls to process emotionally.

I was not home, but my parents were there. My mom told me that Brett broke down. The week before, there was a young boy that had died in a car accident and Brett was there and saw it... The effect that it had on him was seeing what happens to the family... They were crying, and he said, ‘I wanted to cry too’, because you start thinking how you would feel if it was your own kids. Seeing these poor people whose child had just been killed. Brett started thinking about what would have happened if that boy had gone a different way, or what if he had left sooner, this would not have happened. It is those kinds of moments that affect him... ~ Karen

There are things that I know James has dealt with, and those that involve kids are always the hardest. There have been some really traumatic things that I know that he has just internally coped with, but I think, ‘you do not have to do that, and nobody expects that’. ~ Michelle

I know that his first day back on patrol, there was a girl that was killed, and he was the one who had to tell the family. We were just married and that affected him because he was closer to having young kids and worried about the future. He said that the worst thing that happened when he first started was a kid was killed [description of tragic incident]. He said that was shocking for him. ~ Lisa

...he really enjoyed doing traffic reconstruction. Eventually, the emotional aspect started creeping in, and it was not just scientific anymore, so that was negative, but it started off really positive. Jack has not been in traffic reconstruction for two years, ever since the [name of file 2] case...when it involved an innocent victim, somebody just minding their own business or a child, that is when it bothered him. Sadly, I think if he had dealt with it all, if they had counselling after each collision, maybe he would have been able to stay in traffic. ~ Joan

**Emotional detachment.**

This subtheme was created to illustrate a number of the spouses’ descriptions of how their husband seems to suppress his emotions, or deal with it internally. They explained that this suppression can be expressed as grumpiness or a short temper with her and other family members.

I like it when Lyle talks to me, although sometimes he internalizes it and takes it out on me. So I know if he comes home just full on grumpy, that something crappy happened at work... he does not see how the stress that builds up in him comes out. He thinks he copes great, and if there are any issues, no one sees it, and that is good. He does not
know what I am talking about when I say, ‘you’re being a total crab, what’s going on?’
~ Lisa

He was definitely more restless and grumpy, but it was not out of control, and it was
understandable with what he was dealing with. Like, he will be this way for a week or
two or a month, but I know he is going to get through it. ~ Joan

He can only give so much that when he comes home, he says, ‘I don’t want to hear about
your day at work. I don’t want to hear about you having trouble with a particular client
and their children. Don’t ask me another question about it, that’s not my job. My job is
to keep the peace and this is what I know about the law.’ … At the end of four days where
it has been really busy, dealing with bad guys all the time does take a toll, and Steve does
not want to talk, he just wants to de-stress and not think. It is all about him when he
comes home…I do not feel like I can talk about my crummy day, there is no support or
concern there, he will go, ‘yeah, yeah, that’s nice’, because he is dealing with all his own
stuff. ~ Cathy

**Black humour.**

This subtheme highlights the women’s accounts of what they overhear from their partner
from time to time when he discusses an incident to which he responded. Black humour may be
referred to as sick or morbid, and involves perceiving humour in an otherwise potentially
traumatic event. Two of the spouses explained that it is shocking to hear, but that they have
gotten used to it and recognize it as a coping mechanism for their husband. Three of the spouses
who are familiar with black humour due to their involvement in a police or military environment
describe it as a way for the officer to express himself and process a particular incident.

There was a guy who had been run over, and I remember him joking about it on the
phone with a co-worker. I later said to him, ‘that’s somebody’s dad or brother. I’m not
sure how you can joke about that’. He said, ‘that’s the way we cope, is to joke about
it’ … they joke around a lot. They cannot talk to the public, so they talk amongst each
other… That did not sit well with me, but now I get it, I hear it more, and they do not do it
in public. It is a harsh thing. If somebody commits suicide and they jump off a bridge,
they talk about ‘hang time’, and you think, geez! I think they care, but they try to
depersonalize it and keep themselves separated from it. Harder for me, that would stick
to me and I would not be able to let it go. That is why he does what he does, and I do
what I do. ~ Melissa

Ryan is a pretty funny guy. In the culture that I know in the military, and now the police
– you tend to diffuse stress by laughing your asses off about the dumb-ass things that the
bad guys do. Their role is to do the best job that they can in an imperfect situation. So
maybe [descriptions of incidents] are scary, but the way he talks about it, it is a way for him to process and normalize it. ~ Pauline

The use of black humour by police officers could be perceived as insensitive and perhaps appalling by the public, as well as to those spouses that do not work in a policing environment themselves; however, it is widely recognized in the literature as a strategy for managing operational stress among first responder populations (Rowe & Regehr, 2010).

**Problem-focused coping within and beyond the department.**

All of the spouses identified the behaviours that they perceive their husbands to engage in to manage operational stress. Some of the strategies include actions taken and decisions made in the workplace, while other methods involve strategies used by the officer when not at work. Cathy and Michelle described examples of their husbands engaging in specific behaviours while on-duty that help them to connect with the community in a positive way and feel good about doing so.

When Steve gets a chance to do something nice, like giving someone a warning, he says, ‘it helps boost the public image, because good news travels fast.’ It makes him feel good to do small things like that. ~ Cathy

When he was working in the schools, he was there all the time. He would be there in uniform, so it was never like they [sons] were not used to seeing him in his uniform. He would be at the school with his police car, and he always tried to make it a really interactive thing too with everyone. He would go into the different classrooms, and because their school was in his catchment, he was there quite often. It was never an intimidation thing, he would say, ‘…and here’s the lights and the sirens!’ He wanted to make that a leaping off point, so that if you leave a positive impression, when they get into high school, hopefully you have kids coming to you, rather than running away when things are going on. ~ Michelle

Michelle and Joan explained the steps that James and Jack took in the workplace to decrease their stress levels, once they recognized their personal limits.

That is one of the reasons he went into this other role where he is not working nights, because he just could not recover. He was getting run down, and right away, he was getting sick. ~ Michelle
He went back to work for a day or two, knowing he was going to take a leave, and he was off the first time for about four months. He went back for a little while, and listening to the stories of other people going to the crash scenes, he said, ‘no, I cannot handle it.’ … he worked for almost a year doing school liaison, then a position opened up in the community station, and he went there. He enjoys it, he is retiring next year and winding down. ~ Joan

In addition to the actions that their partners take at work, the spouses described the strategies that their husbands use to cope with operational stress when off-duty. Subthemes include Exercise, Seeking Professional Counselling, and Hobbies and Activities.

**Exercise.**

Listed by all of the spouses as a key coping strategy that they perceive their husbands to use, they described it as necessary for their husbands’ work duties. They also explained that it acts as a physical release of stress, and a way to socialize with friends as well.

When he was off on post-traumatic stress leave, a friend of ours had afternoons off so the two of them would meet up and go swimming every afternoon. It was a win-win situation for both of them; they both got into better shape and they were able to talk briefly and help each other deal with different things. ~ Joan

He loves taking the dog for a walk, he loves hiking, he loves going outside and clearing his head. We have got a trail in the woods that we hike. It is about an hour, so he will do that then come back and feel really good about himself because he got exercise. ~ Tamara

When I went home and spoke with Lyle after our meeting, we had a good talk about stress and coping. He said that he uses physical activity, so all of the sports that he plays, as his outlet. He looks forward to that, and he will play with anyone if he has the chance, so it is not necessarily the camaraderie thing, but more of the exertion, the release. His involvement in sports has increased over the years so it might be safe to assume that as his stress level has increased over the years, so has his need for more physical release. ~ Lisa

**Seeking professional counselling.**

The women discussed their thoughts on professional counselling as another way for their husbands to release some of the emotional burden that they may carry as a result of their work. Pauline and Joan explained that their husbands, Ryan and Jack, have both found the experience
of counselling to be beneficial in helping them cope with stress. Several of the other spouses described instances of encouraging their partners to seek counselling, and times where their partners participated in group debriefings.

When he started seeing [the counselling psychologist] that really helped in the sense that a lot of the attitude at work is suck-it-up type of thing. When he was able to tell [the counselling psychologist] it was like, it is okay, it does happen and it has happened for years. Finally, that acceptance of it was really good… ~ Joan

They have an annual psychological check-in, and it is mandatory for people in what they consider to be high-stress environments. Ryan uses that service, he has developed a relationship with the fellow, sees him at least annually, and I think he can see him a little bit more. Ryan sees the value of proactive mental health, and sees it as a positive benefit that is offered to police personnel so he is happy to take advantage of it…He tells me about some of what they discuss and this is a catalyst for further conversation or ideas that might be coming up for me. Basically it helps, as a bit of an “ice breaker” and it is a focused time of the year that Ryan thinks about the impact of his police service on himself and on his family. He will often ask me questions from my perspective after he has had this session. ~ Pauline

It makes me worry, and I have encouraged him over the years to go and talk to somebody. I say, ‘I know you don’t want to burden me with all of the things that have been happening, but it would be good for you just to go and get that off your chest’. He has never taken up on that, which is too bad. Often, his feedback is, ‘well, there is counselling there, but nobody will go because then you’re branded as a sissy.’ There is a stigma attached to it still, there really is. So, they end up eating a lot of that, which I think shows in its own health ways…He deals with that in his own way by focusing his attention in other areas, whether avoidance is the best technique to get over that kind of stuff, I do not know. ~ Michelle

I have tried occasionally to get him to go to a counsellor to talk with somebody who is there just for you, but I think he thinks you have to have quite a problem. ~ Melissa

They like the debriefings, I think because it is a group, everyone experienced the same thing, and a lot of people voice what others cannot, and they know it stays there. Lyle is part of the critical incident team at his department as well, so he is a trained guy. It does not happen too often that there is a debriefing, but any time there are kids involved or something really messy that happens, they try to get everyone together. They know that different things affect people in different ways. ~ Lisa

**Hobbies and activities.**

While seeking counselling is a more formal and structured method for officers to cope with stress, the majority of spouses described their observations of their husbands pursuing
hobbies and activities as healthy distractions, in addition to exercise. Joan, Tamara, and Karen listed activities such as gardening, reading, cooking, and music as outlets for stress; while Michelle and Pauline explained the ways in which their partners engage in active parenting.

If Neil does not want to be bothered, he will go upstairs and play his computer game, or read his book, or just do things himself…To shut things off mentally, he does not talk about it; he dives into a book or something. ~ Tamara

Brett is a very talented musician. He teaches guitar, he leads worship at our church, and he writes music. I would say his music is an outlet. ~ Karen

Jack gets through everything by cooking and eating, which would be good, but he has to learn to control the amount of food, and he likes sauces, so we have all gained weight because of it… He loves to putter in the garden, he did Tai Chi for awhile, and he took a carving class, which was really neat and something he wanted to follow up on. He likes to read and he vegs sometimes, which is good… He spent all day yesterday in the garden while I was working, and you notice afterwards when he has done something like that, he is more relaxed. ~ Joan

James has always been very involved in the community. He has always coached, and I think that has been a good outlet for him. The whole time, when our kids were growing up, he always coached one of their hockey teams, which in itself is very time-consuming. I think he really enjoys that, and I think it helps get his mind off of whatever stress he is working on. ~ Michelle

Ryan is incredibly attuned to emotional health, particularly around our son, and he is a more active parent than I am, he is very hands-on. All the daddy cops are so tuned into their kids. They are such wonderful fathers! He focuses on things that he considers priorities, like putting attention into our son, so he finds the quality of that diversion or emphasis, and then he reprioritizes on those things. ~ Pauline

From the accounts of all of these women, it is evident that their husbands have found their own individual ways of managing the operational stress that they experience, through maintaining both their physical and mental health. In sharing their stories, these women expressed their own emotions related to their partner’s work. The women described how as spouses, they too experience an emotional impact of a career in policing. Each of the women expressed that there are both positive and negative impacts on her and her husband as individuals and on their relationship together.
Feeling like an outsider.

Half of the women described feelings of separateness, exclusion, and disconnection from their partner’s work life, which they perceive to be a direct impact of the nature of police work. They also explained that the behaviour of the police organization itself can contribute to this feeling of being excluded. Of particular note in this theme is that the two spouses of RCMP members described their partner’s work as being like a “separate marriage”.

There will always be that separation, and it is like he is married to something else – his job. I just have to deal with it; that is the way our life is, and that is the way our marriage is, and I do not have a choice. It is hard, and I do not think a lot of people can handle that...One thing that I have really come to know is that he has bonds with people that I will never have with him...He texts his friends and they have private jokes about what they saw, and that kind of stuff...I think that being the wife, emotionally, is the hardest part of all of this. It is like I have my husband seventy percent of the time. He is not cheating on me, but he is cheating on my time that we have together. It is hard, and I do not think a lot of people can handle that...One thing that I have really come to know is that he has bonds with people that I will never have with him...He texts his friends and they have private jokes about what they saw, and that kind of stuff...I think that being the wife, emotionally, is the hardest part of all of this. It is like I have my husband seventy percent of the time. He is not cheating on me, but he is cheating on my time that we have together. It is not his fault, he talks to people in the community and he sees people, and I just say, ‘hi, I’m his wife.’ I stand in the background, and it is a double-edged sword, because I have chosen to do that, but there is a consequence. ~ Tamara

Steve will talk about it, but it is like a whole separate marriage he has, so that is hard. It is about life and death, and only they can experience it. I get that, he gets that, but it is still very separate. He still has all his classmates, they are all talking to one another and have been since graduation, and I am only finding out about it a year and a half later! I say, ‘it hurts Steve, I’m your wife!’... They have their own lingo and jokes, and it feels weird for me, because that is not my circle. Even with his friends, they include me, but when he is with other officers, they have their own little clique, and they do not let a lot of people into that. ~ Cathy

Pauline, Michelle, and Tamara described hearing about incidents that their husbands dealt with on the job, long after the events took place.

Ryan will talk about some things with me, but he avoids talking about other things, where I just do not hear about it. Sometimes we will be at a function where there are other cops, and he will be talking about something, and I will have had no knowledge of it. He will have to sign something to say they will not speak about it, and there is stuff that he literally will not tell me about, I cannot get it out of him. I know it is huge, and he says, ‘oh, I’m going here again’, and I know something is up and he cannot tell me. It does not bother him, but it really bothers me. Then I will see it on the front page of the newspaper, and I will say, ‘ohhh!’ ~ Pauline
He will be gone for days, or he will say something at a party, and I will say, ‘you never told me that!’ He will think he did, and then I realize, ‘that’s probably the time that I didn’t see you for three days’. I feel left out. ~ Tamara

There have been a couple of things that have come out, maybe a year after it has happened. I say, ‘why didn’t you tell me about that?’ ~ Michelle

**Concern about the potential for infidelity.**

This subtheme highlights the worries expressed by half of the spouses that their husband may become too close to a female police member, due to the bonds that develop among officers on the job. A few of the spouses also expressed personal knowledge of affairs happening within their husbands’ respective police departments. Given that there was a previous history of infidelity in their relationship, Karen in particular expressed that this is a recurring concern for her.

I do not have any concerns any more than the average woman does, but I would be far more concerned about him cheating with somebody in his office than I would about him finding someone outside. It would shock the hell out of me if he ended up in a relationship with somebody who was not related to his work, just because there is so little time to meet people! That is what you see most of the time, where it is people that went to the same academy together, or they were trainer-trainee, and the relationship started during that time or later down the road, or they work on the same shift and they are always thrown together. ~ Lisa

When he became a police officer, as soon as they put the uniform on, women just ogle these guys. People are curious about police, what do they think? What do they do? What are they like? What goes on behind the gun? What is their family like? It is exciting and they want to be a part of it. I think some men, and women too, can get caught up in that, and it can be a pretty slippery slope to get the attention. So it is important for me to keep our marriage healthy; that is a big priority in our lives. There have been a lot of thoughts that have come up in my mind, when I know that he is working a 12-hour shift with a female officer. There are common things that they are going to share, she is going to understand him, there are situations they can get into, and time spent alone… It is hard to trust when I have been through mistrust, but I am very open with him, and I tell him that. ~ Karen

…the things I hear and see around here with members. It is just sad, and I see it all the time. I see people cheating on each other, and it bugs me!..Because Neil is young still, it is always a worry that I do not give him enough or support him enough. He knows I get jealous. I ask, ‘who are you texting at 10 o’clock?’ It was one of the volunteers at his
detachment who had a question. I said, ‘she can text you when you’re working! Why is she texting you now? How old is she? What does she do? What the fuck is she doing texting you on your personal phone?’… I totally admit that I check his phone. Not all the time, but I have once in awhile, and I ask, ‘who’s this?’ I do not know if he erases it, I do not want to know, and what am I going to do about it? I have some suspicions because of the double life, and I cannot do anything about it, so I just have to trust that he comes home to me, he is faithful to me, and he is not cheating on me at work. He always says things to reassure me, since I see it going on. ~ Tamara

…there are a lot of broken marriages and affairs going on. I know some that are going on right now and there are people that have had multiple things. I remember once he got close to this one woman on his shift but honestly, it did not bother me at all. He is a friendly guy, and I thought, hmm, someone could misinterpret that. I guess it is about trust too. Do you trust your partner? I do, unless I have a reason not to. I think if anything was going to happen, it would have already and we have weathered the storm, and things are good. Who knows? Anything can happen in life. ~ Melissa

_A perceived lack of recognition of spouses._

In this subtheme, half of the spouses described feeling like their support for their husband and his career goes unacknowledged by the police organization. Stress, resentment, and feeling like a single parent were the common emotions that the majority of the spouses described feeling during the beginning of their partner’s career and the recruit training process; with pride being described by some of the them upon seeing their husband graduate from police training, and later on occasions when he has received positive recognition from the police force for specific actions while carrying out his duties. Tamara explained the frustration and lack of support that she and Neil felt when trying to access health benefits through the RCMP for fertility treatment.

It was interesting to see all the cadets up there; it was all about them, not the families. It was very strange, like we were all invisible. ~ Cathy

At the graduation, he was the valedictorian and I remember thinking, it is nice that they get all the recognition, but what about us? I think they thank the families, but it was like, ‘you must adapt around them’. At the time, I did not feel like they got that we are the backbone of these people. I do not think any of them could do it without their supportive other. ~ Melissa

We actually had to go to a fertility clinic, and this is the kicker with the RCMP as well, he is on a different plan than I am. Although we are married and we are both trying to
have children, because I am not on his plan, the RCMP will not cover any of our medical expenses. If he was the female and I was the male, the RCMP would cover everything from a boob job to fertility to everything! But they will not cover anything of mine, because I am not a member. We are having issues having a child, and our doctor recommended us to go to a fertility clinic, but they still will not. Even though Neil said, ‘this affects my self-esteem’, they said, ‘too bad’. We have tried every angle. ~ Tamara

There is a Christmas party, but I think they would do well to do more things throughout the year for single people or couples without kids, like barbeques or things like that. Having been in the CF and seeing what they do for military families, the police department lags grossly behind, there is no acknowledgement at all. ~ Pauline

Despite the perceived lack of recognition that some of these spouses feel, they continue to provide support to their husbands and find ways to cope individually and as a couple with stress in the relationship. A number of these women also described the emotions that they feel when they hear about incidents encountered by their partner at work.

**Vicarious emotions.**

Arising from a sense of empathy that one has for another’s experience, these are emotions that are felt in one individual that parallel the emotions of another. In this theme, the spouse may have the same emotional response as her husband to certain issues or incidents related to his police duties. Joan expressed her emotions related to her husband Jack’s post-traumatic stress, while a number of the other spouses expressed feelings of frustration regarding issues such as the media scrutiny of police officers.

In some ways, I felt like, ‘I dropped the ball’. I was thinking, there is something wrong, he should go talk to somebody… You could always do it better; you always think you should have done this and not that. I always think I should have caught the post-traumatic stress earlier, but it is what it is. ~ Joan

In the [name of file 2] case, it was different [pause; teary]. She looked very much like our niece, who had leukemia, and every time you saw the picture of her and knew what had happened, it was more personal. It should not have been, but it was, I cannot explain why. Having to listen to the media and the disrespect has been difficult. I know Jack feels like it is a reflection on him… in that case, the parent put everything into the media very quickly, and you could not escape it! You felt horrible for them, but at the same time, it was like, please take her picture off the TV! He was trying to deal with it and we
Co-worker conflicts are probably the biggest stress, more than trauma on the job. It is not the blazing in with guns; it is the crazy co-workers. One guy in particular has dogged Kevin for years. He is a bully to some members, and they have very different philosophies. That was stressful, because I would hear about him all the time. After awhile, I said, ‘don’t just keep talking about it. You can only change you.’ I wanted to go up to the guy and go, ‘do you know what a knucklehead you are?’ I feel vicarious frustration, if there is such a term, but I am only getting one side of the story. ~ Melissa

The other stress in a police marriage is the public perception. It is very negative, and it is hurtful for the guys that are involved in it, but it is also hurtful for the family. You may know the real story, and there is always another side. ~ Karen

Drinking and driving surprised both of us. Now that we have almost zero tolerance, people are still doing it! They should be locked up for being dumb! You get so frustrated… ~ Cathy

We watch a lot of news. I have learned a lot, and I have learned to hate it too, because I care too much. Lyle is my husband, and there are all these good people that I work with. There is always going to be a bad apple in the bunch, no matter what job you are in. ~ Lisa

These women provided in-depth accounts of how they perceive themselves to be impacted by their husband’s work. Given that they all perceived police work to have an impact on their marital relationship, they explained what they find useful for themselves in coping with the stress of policing; as well as the strategies that they use with their partner.

**Willing to talk, and willing to pay attention.**

This theme was created to illustrate the communication strategies used within these marital relationships. Each of the women described the ways in which her husband is able to share information about his work, and the ways in which she receives the information.

**Comfort from knowledge about the job.**

All of the women explained that they feel a sense of comfort or ease in having knowledge of their partner’s work, such as the nature of the incidents to which he responds, the training he receives on the job, and the people with whom he works. Tamara and Lisa expressed a
familiarity with the police culture and how this assists them in communicating and coping as a couple. The other women described the ways in which they have learned to listen and ask questions about their partner’s duties in order to become more familiar with his working life and have a better understanding of how to support him.

I know it is important for him to get it off his chest, so if I am cooking dinner or something, I always say, ‘yeah, I’m listening!’ Or ‘hold that thought for a minute’ so that he knows I am listening, and I did not just leave the room. ~ Tamara

I assume that most guys go home and talk about something horrible that happened, but some guys probably do not for fear of revealing too much. I am a little more hardened to it too. There is some traumatic stuff, and maybe some people’s wives do not want to hear about it, or cannot take it. I have learned to compartmentalize it, as I am sure they do too. ~ Lisa

We are lucky that way, because we talk a different talk than a cop and a regular wife that does not work in the environment. We know the same type of things, so he will vent, and I will just give him reactions…When we first moved in together, I was really upset. I said, ‘tell me everything!’ He would then say, ‘I don’t want to talk about it, I just worked all day!’ I think because of the work I do now, I get it. I know quite a few marriages where both people are in the policing environment, and their marriages work, probably because of the understanding and knowledge. ~ Tamara

He tells me, ‘this happened, I don’t know if I should…’ and I say, ‘yeah, you need to tell me’, otherwise, I start imagining things that are not true. It helps me to know what he is doing in his job. I think part of his coping too is being able to talk about it, knowing that my personality is not to freak out. I will ask him questions and just imagine it. ~ Karen

One nice thing that we have done a couple of times is Kevin’s [specialized work team] will offer information to spouses. We all get more familiar with their work, and gain a better appreciation. I think that would be a nice support group, but I am not friends with other wives or husbands of cops unless I am at an event with regular people that I see every year and we talk. ~ Melissa

James has been really good at not sharing a lot of gruesome details with me over the years; he tries to protect me from that…When he gets to that point of being able to talk, I just let him vent and try to be supportive when he tells me those things. I just feel really empathetic and I say, ‘that must have been really hard for you to see, because I can only imagine what that must have been like to have been there to see that.’ I think he appreciates that. ~ Michelle

I remember a few occasions where he has come in and told me about horrible things, that were things that I knew affected him, because he spoke so specifically. I care, and I know that it is a big deal when Lyle does vent to me, I know it must be if he is bringing it
up. It makes me want to help him deal with it more. Some of the things your police spouse needs to talk about are terrible but you have to be strong enough to listen. There are things they can talk about and sometimes you might be the only person they feel they can show their “weakness” to. ~ Lisa

In addition to listening and asking questions when their partners share information about operational stress, Melissa, Tamara, and Michelle all indicated that they are able to tell their partners when they cannot hear any more. Melissa and Michelle both explained that their husbands are now more aware of their limits, and what types of information to censor in their conversations.

*Noticing non-verbals.*

In this subtheme, the majority of the women also explained the ways in which they observe their husband’s behaviour. Noticing non-verbal behaviours in their husband appears to be a skill that many of these spouses practice regularly. They described how it assists them in getting a sense of what he might be experiencing when he is not talking. Joan explained the behaviours that she started noticing in Jack when he was trying to cope with the effects of post-traumatic stress. Cathy, Tamara, and Michelle described that they respond to their husbands’ non-verbal behaviours by asking what is going on, and giving him space to be alone for awhile. They explained that they check in with him later on to provide him with the opportunity to express what he is feeling.

Jack would start shaking when he saw the pictures on TV. He is the type that likes to read the newspaper cover to cover, every story, but I started noticing that certain pages he would turn quickly. He was not sleeping at night; he would wake up shaking or upset. ~ Joan

There was a lot expected of him at work, and he was out of his element, he was with a different group of people, under the authority of a different group, and he got quieter than normal. I know when he is thinking about something to do with work, he gets a lot quieter. Our relationship suffered, but I do not know if that was a symptom or a cause. ~ Lisa
at work when there were things that were bothering him, even though he would not tell me about them, I could tell. I knew he was really stressed out when he would grind his teeth in the middle of the night, or he would be a restless sleeper...he would sometimes even, not talk in his sleep, but make these noises, and I could tell he was dreaming about something. He has also had colitis since he was a teenager, so there would be times too that that would flare up and that would tie in with what was going on, so that is stress-related. He also gets a little bit quieter, or a little bit more edgy. When he was working shiftwork, it was hard to differentiate between just being tired and cranky, or being stressed out! [Laughs] He knows that he can have that space for a couple of days, then I say, ‘okay, you have been pretty cranky. What is going on?’ I can see it crest, so it is just a sense of knowing when he is ready to talk about it. Until then, I take a bit of a wide berth and carry on! [Laughs] ~ Michelle

I say, ‘okay, well, I’m leaving you alone. I’ll wait until you’re ready to come back around and we can go off and do something, or be present with one another.’… You are lost at what to do, what is going to be the right thing to say? Do you say, ‘you’re isolating yourself’? If you put that pressure on them, they are going to snap, and you do not want to push in that sense. You let them go a little bit, and then say, ‘why don’t we go and do this?’ ~ Cathy

…if it is a huge file, I ask, ‘what’s the matter?’ And he says, ‘I can’t talk about it, we’re going to court.’ So instead, he will say, ‘it just fucking sucks’ and he will leave. I do not like it when he does not talk to me, but usually, he talks to me a lot, so it is good…I will leave him alone. When he wants to come to me, he will come. I will go up and say, ‘are you okay?’ Then I just let him know when dinner will be ready. ~ Tamara

These women identified the strategies that they use to communicate with their husbands at home, and a number of them also explained the ways in which they maintain communication throughout the day.

**Staying connected.**

Staying connected during the day is highlighted by Melissa, Cathy, and Karen as important to them as a means of decreasing their worry or concern if their partner is working late, or if they are aware that he is involved in a specific call-out during his shift.

When texting came out, it was awesome! It works really well, and he is good, he texts me! It is not an ideal way to communicate, but if you have a good foundation, then a bit of encouragement or something funny, I like that. When he is able to, he will usually phone and say, ‘I’m safe’ or text me ‘all good’. Unless I hear otherwise, I assume everything is good. ~ Melissa
I am his wife, and I wait for those phone calls, even if it is a text in a minute, like, just text me and let me know you are okay. You just do not know, there are a lot of crazy people out there. I get that, he gets that, and most police officers get it. Usually he gives me a call to say, ‘I’m coming home’ or ‘I’m going to be late’ or ‘I have to write reports’ or whatever. ~ Cathy

The women also explained the strategies they use as a couple during those times when the communication between them is becoming emotionally charged.

**Taking a break, or taking a stand.**

This theme highlights the ways in which these spouses have learned how to communicate with their partners to diffuse conflict. A number of the women described recognizing the need to take a break and walk away from the conversation with their partner to calm down before reconnecting to talk about the issue. Michelle and Karen also explained the need to take a stand on an issue in order to make it clear to their partner how they feel about it.

We try to speak to each other respectfully, and when we are not emotionally charged, so when we are able to listen and process it. I think actually last night was the most stressed we have been in awhile. Again, it had very little to do with policing, but we were able to talk, identify it, and name what it is we are feeling and why. ~ Pauline

Neil gets frustrated with me sometimes, because I do not always get out what I want to say when I am describing things. He says, ‘what is it? What happens with that?’ I get frustrated and I just say, ‘whatever, I’m not going to talk about it.’ We walk away from each other, and then I will say, ‘sorry, I was kind of bitchy just then, and you were too’, and he says, ‘yeah, sorry’. We make it work and we laugh. ~ Tamara

If one of us is really stressed and we are not in sync, then my way is to go for a drive and cool off, and an hour later, everything is fine, let’s go for coffee. ~ Joan

Somebody has to be the bigger person and say, ‘this is not worth it, forget it!’ I have to pick my battles, or we might have to take a break from it then come back. I usually have to get my facts together and not do it emotionally. He is not going to respond to tears. When you are emotional, you are not making sense. ~ Karen

We have always had an unspoken rule where only one person is crazy at a time! [Laughs] We say, ‘okay, both of us are not allowed to be totally over-emotional at the same time!’ That is something that has just naturally evolved over the years, all through our marriage. If someone is upset, the other person tends to be super calm, and says, ‘okay, I will let
you work on that, and when you are feeling more like yourself, come back and talk to me!’ ~ Michelle

I do not want to say it is bullying, but as I mentioned, they are used to things being done their way, so you have to stand up for yourself. I say to James, ‘we’re not doing that this way this time. What if we did this instead?’ That has taken us time to come around to too. ~ Michelle

After a few incidences of this, I realized what was going on, and I said, ‘you need to leave your attitude and your badge at the front door. We’re your family, we’re not the criminal, you can save that for the street…You’re not coming in here treating us like that. We won’t stand for that.’ There was a change with him; he realized that it was not right and not fair to treat his family like that. Sometimes I have to remind him, it will come up again. I say, ‘you’re being a little too hard on them’. ~ Karen

All of the spouses discussed how they communicate as a couple to cope with the stress they experience as individuals and in their relationship together. Each woman also identified the ways in which they release stress through activities together. Every spouse listed time spent relaxing together as crucial for reconnecting as a couple.

**Healthy distractions as a couple.**

The majority of spouses described vacations with their husband as being one of the consistent things they do to spend quality time together, away from the stress of work and daily life. Other strategies listed by the women include going for coffee or a walk together regularly, having a shared project, playing sports and exercising together, and engaging in other hobbies enjoyed by both of them.

This maybe sounds trivial, but we started going on little holidays, because we were being separated as a family so much. Even though you think, oh we cannot really afford this; I do not think we could have afforded not to go… I did notice when we were away on holiday, that it took us getting out of our own country and being away for at least two weeks for him to detach. When we got home, he said, ‘I could retire tomorrow, I could leave it all behind.’ That made an impression on me; it must be very stressful to live in that world. That is why I like travelling; it helps you get new perspectives. ~ Melissa

We live beside a park now, which makes it easier. Now we have baseball gloves, and we are looking at getting boxing gloves. Even golfing, I want to have fun, and I know I am not going to do it properly. Steve does not care, he thinks, ‘you’re having fun, good.’ We are playing a lot more tennis now, and biking, so doing activities away from
home…We have a trip coming up, so that is more of our de-stressing. We do not need to deal with the house, the moms, the dogs, or work; we will just go off and have fun. We make it a habit not to talk about work, and just be engaged. ~ Cathy

We make sure to spend time alone as a couple. We will go out on date nights regularly. When we had to get babysitters it was a little more complicated, but now that our kids are older, we will just say we are going out for dinner or a movie, or we will go for a walk or a run, or go away for the weekend, just to have that time together. ~ Karen

He actually left his phone at home when we went on our holiday. I thought that was a big step in his life! [Laughs] I noticed he was more outgoing, goofier, and less worried about what people would think. It was a nice change, and he is an entertainer! [Laughs] It was nice to see him just chill out, and not be a cop, and just put the wallet away. ~ Lisa

I know we made a real effort to have a date night when our kids were super busy, where it was our time, and we could sit down and have a real conversation with each other that did not revolve around hockey schedules and homework! That can be hard to do, but we always try. ~ Michelle

…we took a trip to Bermuda to stay with a friend of ours who was living there. It was the first time that we actually had fun. There is something to be said about going on a holiday, getting out of your environment and just focusing on your partner. ~ Pauline

We can tell when the other is stressed. We are movie buffs, so we love going to the movies… When we have days off together, we try and go for a two or three-hour hike. Now that winter is here, we snowshoe, because I cannot ski right now. ~ Tamara

The houses that we bought, that is our project, our shared dream. For a while, we did not tell anybody, so it was our little sneaky thing that we were doing. It is long-term, we have a goal, and I hope it will help with retirement so that when we both want to stop, we can. ~ Melissa

Lately, now that our daughter is older, we have started getting theatre tickets. We have shows that we are going to see, so always having something fun to look forward to helps to get through those more serious, difficult times. ~ Joan

One way we have always dealt with things is projects. We usually watch TV, and it got to the point where we could not put the TV on. So we said, ‘ok, we need a project!’ Finding projects to keep his mind off what was going on was really helpful, and the whole family got involved. ~ Joan

Summary

Excerpts from the coded narratives of each participant were used in this chapter to highlight the themes and subthemes that were developed through thematic analysis. The full
narratives are located in the appendix of this paper. All of the women were provided with the opportunity to review their story in its entirety, and add, clarify, or remove any information they wished, to ensure that the narratives portrayed their experience accurately. However, it must be acknowledged that much of the emotional expression with which a story is told cannot be captured on paper.

The nine themes and 18 subthemes created through the data analysis process explore the ways in which the spouses perceive a career in policing as being a lifestyle for the couple and family, while some aspects of it are viewed as just being part of the job. All of the women identified how they perceive their husband to cope with the operational stress arising from his work duties, and the strategies that they have learned as a couple that help them to manage both daily stressors, and the more serious, critical life events throughout the course of their marriage.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

It was a privilege for me to meet with each of these women and hear their stories. I am inspired by the grace and humour of their storytelling, and their insights regarding the level of commitment in the relationship with their husband, the willingness of each partner to communicate and acknowledge the needs of the other, and the strategies used as a couple to cope with unique stressors arising from policing, and those that could impact any couple, regardless of career choice. The women clarified that they perceive operational duties to have both positive and negative impacts on their marriage, and highlighted some of the minor and major stressors they have faced in their relationship.

This research study does not simply involve the mere reporting of an experience over time. Narrative inquiry asks the participant to create subjectivity through storytelling. One can never fully understand the experience of another; however, through the language used in storytelling and the points one chooses to highlight in their story, we can gain an understanding of their perceptions of their experiences. This study focuses on learning what it means to these women to be a spouse of a police officer and perhaps how they want themselves to be portrayed as spouses. As I became closely connected with the content of these stories through the process of transcribing, reviewing, and analyzing the data, I acknowledged my own range of emotional reactions to the stories, a testament to the power of narrative to provide context and communicate a rich understanding of the meaning one attributes to an experience over time.

Implications for theory

Work-family conflict: The spillover effect.

Each of the women described the impact of their partner’s work duties on their life
together, which are highlighted particularly in the themes of hypervigilance, never off-duty, and taking a backseat. Other impacts on the relationship included the emotional detachment of the officer, illustrated by Lisa’s comment that Lyle sometimes “internalizes it and takes it out on me”; that comment fits with the findings from Repetti et al. (2009) of increased expressions of irritability with family members following stressful experiences on the job. These findings do fit with the concept of the spillover effect, where the stress experienced by the husbands as a result of operational duties, such as responding to incidents involving serious injury or harm to a child, is felt by the spouses as well. Joan’s emotional expression while sharing her story of helping Jack to get through the effects of posttraumatic stress clearly indicates the way in which Jack’s stress has had an impact on her. Joan expressed that she feels like she should have noticed the signs of his stress sooner, and yet, many of Jack’s emotions – such as feeling a personal connection to the incident - were being felt by Joan as well. Joan’s own individual experience of this incident, as a result of her efforts in trying to process the information is similar to the experience described by Charles Figley in his “Compassion Fatigue Model” (1998).

All of the women identified the individual coping strategies that they perceive their husband to use in managing stress from operational duties, and the spouses also described how they manage stress for themselves in the relationship. Where the spillover effect theory does not fit with these women’s experiences is in the fact that it is not solely individual coping strategies being enacted in their relationships; rather, every participant expressed a number of ways that both she and her husband communicate with one another to manage stressors jointly.

**Dyadic coping.**

The theory of dyadic coping fits well with the spouses’ descriptions of some of the sacrifices that they feel they have made for their husband to pursue a career in policing, such as
being the primary caregiver to the children, adjusting plans and rescheduling events, as well as
the ways in which they assist with tasks such as making dinner after he gets home from a
stressful day at work. These particular actions by the spouse would fit in the category of
delegated coping as described by Bodenmann (2005). Positive common dyadic coping
strategies, specifically problem-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), also appear frequently in
the findings, such as the spouses’ descriptions of engaging in healthy distractions together, as
illustrated by Tamara’s remark regarding being able to tell when one another is stressed, and
doing something enjoyable together such as skiing or going to the movies. Efforts of the spouse
related to positive supportive dyadic coping were also explained in detail under the subthemes of
comfort from knowledge about the job, and noticing non-verbals. Here, each of the women
highlighted the means by which she facilitates her husband’s communication of emotions and
information shared about operational stress. As Michelle explained concisely, when James gets
to the point of being able to talk, she offers her attention to him so that he can vent, then
empathizes with what he has just shared. Lisa described the need to be strong in order to listen
to what her husband has to share, knowing that this would demonstrate to him that she cares
about what he is going through, and is willing to share in helping him find ways to cope with the
stress from work.

Bodenmann (2005) raises an interesting point regarding social support as a coping
strategy. He explained that social support is just one mechanism of common dyadic coping for
the couple, and that it is perceived to be more significant in the marital relationship than any
other relationship. However, he illustrated that if the stressor originates at work, then the
individual may turn to colleagues for support, prior to considering whether to share details of the
stressor with their partner. This issue is particularly salient within the police population, given
the importance placed on the need for camaraderie among officers, and the paramilitary structure of policing which supports bonds between co-workers.

Theories put forth by Karlsson and Christianson (2003) to explain why officers may view their first traumatic experience on the job as the most vivid do not seem to be supported here. The spouses interviewed indicated that their partners certainly do experience the psychological impact of traumatic calls, and certain incidents that occurred later in the officer’s career stand out in their memories more than others, and they do not become desensitized. Some of the spouses did describe the evolution of communication strategies in the relationship to talk about operational stress and its impact, whereas others indicated that it seems they had always communicated openly.

**Novel contributions**

The current study builds on past quantitative research efforts designed to examine the potential impact of police stress on significant others (Alexander & Walker, 1996; Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Miller, 2007). I chose to approach this issue from the perspectives of police spouses to gain a better understanding of the context in which this spillover process occurs, how it impacts them, and the strategies used within the marital relationship to cope with stress. Through the use of narratives, this research provides new insights on the mechanisms of stress in close relationships, as well as detailed accounts of the strategies these couples find useful in coping with stress in their marriage. Initially, I perceived my recruitment strategy for this research project to be a limitation, given the likelihood that only relatively high-functioning, happy couples would be interested in participating; however, that is one of the great strengths of this project. These women shared with me their experiences of dealing with a variety of stressors in their life as a couple, including daily stressors, operational stressors originating from
their partner’s work, and critical life events, such as the death of a parent, infidelity in the marriage, fertility problems, and serious illness. The level of detail that they shared is of great value in understanding the coping trajectory over the development of the marital relationship and the officer’s career. Their accounts of resilience as a couple in the face of stress are refreshing, given that much of the previous research on trauma and coping in marital relationships focuses on the factors leading to dysfunction in the relationship, or dissolution of the marriage (Alexander & Walker, 1996; Roberts & Levenson, 2001).

**Significance of the findings**

Given the capacity for stress to impact communication within the couple relationship, the development of the relationship over time, and the marital satisfaction of both partners (Bodenmann, Pihet, & Kayser, 2006), it is imperative to understand which strategies work to maintain a healthy relationship, and details on how to introduce such methods within the couple relationship. Knowledge of the coping strategies that these couples use jointly can assist counselling professionals in developing interventions to fit the needs and skills of particular clients. Findings from the present study will help to inform the development of new resources and supports for police families, as well as other first-responder groups and couples that experience elevated stress levels over an extended period of time.

**Future research**

Female spouses of male police officers were recruited for the present study. Efforts were made to encourage the participation of male partners of female police officers, as well as same-sex spouses of officers; however, these efforts were unsuccessful. Future research on this topic would benefit from a focus on recruiting these populations using the same methodology, and can be followed by a comparison study across participant groups, for the purpose of determining if
there are any unique needs within each group, in order to tailor the resources and supports to the needs of that particular population. Further exploration of the metaphors used in the participants’ stories could be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning that these women attribute to their experiences, and focusing the research question on resilience within the marital relationship could produce further insights on the positive aspects of stress and coping. A larger, survey-based study could also be conducted to determine if the results from the exploratory research can be extended to the larger population of police spouses. Interviewing both the spouse and the officer in future research could also yield interesting comparisons of their perceptions of the impacts of stress on the relationship, and which coping strategies they perceive to be most effective. Recall is a part of the research question for the current study. To address the data and focus on the day-to-day interactions of police couples without relying solely on the ability of a participant to recall events, a future project could include the use of audio or video observations of the daily living of a police family.

Thoughts and recommendations

At the end of each participant interview, I asked each woman about any thoughts or recommendations that she might have for other police couples, and for the police organization itself. The following are excerpts from their responses to these two questions:

For other police couples.

Kevin told me a lot of cops say, ‘I won’t tell my husband or wife because they can’t handle it.’ I would say, I think they can handle more than you think. Talk to people about what is going on in your job, so it is not a big mystery. I went and watched training sessions, and that helped me to get a picture of what they do, so it gives me confidence. ~ Melissa

Counselling is so important, just to have that third person saying, ‘hey, what’s going on? What’s changed, and how do you deal with it?’ ~ Cathy

That is where 10-62.com came in [when Steve was away at depot training], it was really helpful because you could post saying, ‘I really miss him!’ and get a response saying,
‘this is what you’re going to experience and this is okay, make sure you do something for yourself’, that was the big thing that was recommended. I exercised and it was good, because I did something healthy and productive. ~ Cathy

Work does not have to define anybody. It can be a big part, and something that you are proud of, but be proud of the person that you marry, not what it is that they do professionally; it should not be the driving factor. ~ Pauline

…know what it is that your spouse does; I did a ride-along, and I am lucky because I am hardwired. I can share things. ~ Pauline

I think you need to be resourceful and advocate for yourself too, rather than wait for somebody to spoon-feed you. If you are a cop, you should be able to resource and advocate; otherwise, you are in the wrong profession. Do all your medical or dental stuff yourself, because your husband will not do it! There is a number, but you have to dig, and spend the time to find it and do it. ~ Tamara

You have got to have open communication, and if things are not going right – this is with any marriage – admit that they are not going right, and try to do something about it. Just admit when there is something wrong, or when you need something that you are not getting. ~ Tamara

Morbid humour – get used to it. Some people laugh at funerals and we do not hate them for it. Everyone has a way of expressing themselves and it is not intended to be disrespectful or callous. ~ Lisa

For the police organization.

Be more accountable, when you have bad apples, get rid of them! Do not keep them on or put them on desk duty, my god. It makes it awful for the good guys, and the media is always going to gravitate to the bad apples. If you have bad management and they are in positions of power, get rid of them! What is this loyalty? It devastates members. ~ Cathy

Sometimes people need a push. I do not think there was ever that push, or any follow-up. Nobody officially called him to say, ‘how are you doing? Is there anything we can do to help?’ Had he been home with cancer, you know, they do work parties; they do all these other things. I think a little bit of input or touching base would have been helpful to say, ‘we get it, how are you doing? Are you okay?’ There was nothing physically wrong with him to stop him from doing stuff, but that emotional support was not there. ~ Joan

It would be good to make everybody feel inclusive, and not like outcasts because something happened. I think they need to do that with anybody, whether it is in patrol or elsewhere. Maybe not completely formally, but a combination of informal at the very moment afterwards, as soon as it is possible to have a debriefing, and then follow up within a week with somebody trained to talk to them, just to make sure – is everything
going okay, and to remind them, ‘hey, come see us if you want to, if you are finding a change in eating patterns or sleeping, or drinking or not socializing or enjoying things that you used to enjoy.’ Sometimes, I think they need that invitation, and if they have already made contact with them, I think it would be easier. ~ Joan

I need to feel confident that the department is taking care of the needs, because you can do stuff at home, which you do anyways, but to know that it is backed up at work. They could have acted on it sooner [teary], if they were looking for it [PTSD]. It is so easy, understandably, to just think, ‘he or she will be fine later’. If they could keep a closer eye on it and try to intervene sooner, it is quite possible that it would not escalate to the levels it does. ~ Joan

I think support at the beginning stages really pays off. There is no easy answer, but if people are trained to recognize it, maybe they can feel things out and find out what each person does need. ~ Joan

They could also do seminars, inform the membership and spouses, and communicate to spouses more actively about what kind of resources are available, what is going on, and changes that are coming up. I think it would be fairly easy for the department, the union, or both to create a service that serves police families. You could centralize this information in a log-in, web-based service so that the member, their friends, and family could all access it. ~ Pauline

If there was a book available that spouses could open up with information and contact details if you need help with dental stuff, counselling, and other things, just on what we can do and where we can go. Or just a phone number to call and say, ‘I need help with this!’ or ‘how do I fill this form out?’ Resources for the kids and spouses of the police members on topics like moving to a new area would be really helpful, because we have no idea! It is so confusing with a federal agency because there is so much stuff! Even having some good books to read, or having a spouses’ blog or webpage where you can bounce ideas off each other or post a question, that would be great. If we picked up and moved, I do not even know what the RCMP would pay for. ~ Tamara

There definitely needs to be training for these guys at the JI level on the effects that are going to happen in the family. I think they need to be aware of that, and how to cope with the negatives of the job. To not have that negative effect on your family because of the type of position that you carry, and to learn how to relieve stress in a healthy way. I think it would be great to have an experienced spouse available to answer questions and do a lecture with the spouses. A panel, where people at different stages can share their experiences, could work well, and I think it would be an eye-opener. ~ Karen

Officers are judged both publicly and privately as to who they spend time with and how they spend their time. Support your members publicly – stand up for the people who are acting on your behalf and remember that their friends and families are also affected by what you say and/or do in the name of the organization. We all forget sometimes that police officers are human. ~ Lisa
I would like to see them be able to offer something – I am sure they do. I just do not know how they can get to that point where the guys feel like they can phone, and it would not be fodder for everyone in the office. It probably is not, but I think that is the perception. So to somehow get over that stigma and say, ‘it is okay, if you need to talk to somebody, these are the options’. I do not know if they build that into their training now at the JI, or if that is just brushed over, because maybe it is too “foo-foo”. But it is important, and he has seen guys that he has worked with over the years who became burnt out with some really serious posttraumatic stress, that they have had to, or have not been able to, get over. It is hard to see people that we have known suffer through that. Some of them are career ending, and I think that is really sad. ~ Michelle

Based on the thoughts and recommendations of these police spouses regarding ways to cope with stress in the marriage, how to find support for themselves and their husband, and what they would like to see organized through the police organization, it is very clear that a lot of work needs to be done in this area. It requires a paradigm shift within the culture of policing, which is not an easy task. Perhaps by starting at the point of one’s entry into police training, the recognition of the value of preventive training for mental well-being, listed as a resource that would be useful in coping with future stressors (Karlsson & Christianson, 2003), could begin to develop.

Currently, there are some connections being made at the training level between the organization, new police officers, and their family members. Linda Stewart is an instructor with the police academy at the Justice Institute of British Columbia and the coordinator of the spousal awareness evening for new police recruits, their families and friends. Linda indicated that family and friends are invited to attend, and the evening begins with introductions of the academy staff, followed by details of the program, what to expect regarding the recruit’s various stressors with exams for instance, and contact information for each instructor (L. Stewart, personal communication, March 14, 2012). Family members are told to be aware of changes in the personality of the recruit, and they are informed that they can contact any of the instructors at any time. The recruits then leave the room, and the instructors hold a question and answer
session for the spouses and other family members. There is no human resources information
provided to families on this night, as recruits are hired by different municipal police departments
across the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley; therefore there is no centralized information as
each department has its own human resources section. The instructors do provide reassurance to
families that each section is very open to speaking with spouses, and spouses are encouraged to
contact human resources if they have any concerns or need information on where to go for help.
The book *Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement* (Glimartin, 2002) is recommended as a
resource for family members, and police academy instructors encourage the recruits regularly to
maintain a healthy balance of family time, social activities, and work (L. Stewart, personal
communication, March 21, 2012).

An informational evening during recruit training is a good start in providing support to
officers and their families. Making contact with family members early on in the career of the
officer and providing information regularly throughout the career is clearly viewed as important
step for any police organization to take, from the perspectives of the spouses who participated in
this study. Through the development of resources to support police families at various stages, it
is hoped that spouses’ feelings of being an outsider, and being alone in trying to find ways to
support an officer who may be experiencing an accumulation of operational stress, will be
replaced by feelings of inclusion and support from the police organization. In turn, I believe this
will give police couples and their families the support they need to maintain resilience in their
marriage and mental wellness throughout their relationship and the officer’s career.
References


QSR International Pty Ltd. (2010). NVivo (Version 9) [qualitative data analysis software].


Appendix A: Narrative summaries

Melissa’s story

Background

Melissa and Kevin have been together as a couple for 19 years, and married for 17; neither of them was married previously. Melissa is 44 years of age, and Kevin is 47. The couple has three kids, each 2 years apart. Kevin has been serving as a constable of a municipal police department for 12 years, and Melissa is a clinical counsellor and consultant. Melissa and Kevin were married prior to Kevin becoming a police officer.

On establishing themselves as a couple (moving in, having kids, etc.):

We met when I worked as a student and he was a trainer one summer, we started dating, and I knew pretty quickly that he was it. That scared him a little bit, and he suddenly cut off all communication. We started fresh again, and got married a couple of years later, in 1994.

My mom got lung cancer the following year in 1995, so it was pretty bad. My parents had a suite in their house and we moved in to support my mom. I have three other siblings and we all took a role in helping her. I got pregnant in 1996; this would be her first grandchild. She died in September that year, and my son was born in January 1997. That was rough, because I was pregnant and in school while my mom was ill.

When my son was born, that was nice because we went from a death to a birth, and it gave us another focus. My next son was born in December of 1998. Kevin got into the police department the next year. My dad met someone a year after my mom died, and then there was no one living upstairs, so we bought the house. It was nice to finally make that purchase.

At the end of the police academy - we thought, when did we have the time? - I got pregnant with my daughter. She was born in 2001, and three months later, I started working with
the group that I work with now. She and my husband really connected; I think he took some parental leave, and he would step in and do stuff other dads do not do, so I was really fortunate. When our kids were little, we had this deal where I would feed them and he would change them. My oldest son started kindergarten in 2002. I started my master’s degree in 2008 when my youngest was in school full time. My whole family had to step up to the plate, kids included, and they did a great job. This maybe sounds trivial, but we started going on little holidays, because we were being separated as a family so much. Even though you think, oh we cannot really afford this; I do not think we could have afforded not to go.

In 2009, Kevin and I decided to buy an investment property! That was a scary thing, because it is a lot of money! We both enjoyed the process, even though we had a couple of sleepless nights. I was at the tail end of my master’s then.

In 2010, Kevin’s mom died suddenly from a heart attack. It was interesting to watch Kevin’s reaction. He is not a guy that gets really stressed ever, and he was upset, but okay. He could tell by the way the paramedics were not moving fast, that he thinks she actually died there at the bingo hall, that they would be moving faster if she could be saved. I think he was getting himself ready there. At the hospital, he said they put him in the little room, and he just knew. He had phoned my brother and arranged for him to come over, because he knew that I would come undone, and I did. He was there for his dad, doing what he needed to do. As time went on, he did not show outward emotion about it. I said to him, ‘I know everybody grieves differently, but I’m not seeing anything. Are you holding it in?’ He said, ‘no, no. I’m really sad, but I don’t feel this need to cry, or get angry’. At her memorial, he cried there, and we all started crying. Later, he said, ‘either I’m coping really well, or I’m just burying it so deep even I don’t know’. It has been a year and a bit, and I check in every once in awhile. I keep waiting for
the day that something really rattles him, but I have not seen it yet, unless we have both got our
blinders on. We bought another house shortly after that, and we have had it for a year.

On Kevin pursuing a career in policing, and coping with the transition to the new career:

I think I knew he wanted to do policing since I met him, and it seemed like a natural
evolution. I was saying, ‘it’s now or never’, and I remember we talked about it quite a bit. I
totally supported it, it was like, ‘this is your dream, and this is what you want to do, go for it’. It
was not drastic, I was used to that kind of lifestyle, and his job gave us a test-run. It was quite
stressful, like is he going to get in or not? He presented himself well and had life experience, so
it looked good. We ruled the RCMP out right away, because we thought, depot, far away, two
kids, taking a financial hit, do not know where you are going to end up, no thanks.

He went to the police academy. He wanted to do really well, and he did. He would stay
after and study, and would get home at eight at night. Block one of the academy was the worst;
it was brutal, because they were not treated very well there, kind of like the military. There was
no balance there at all. Plus it was different, from him having a regular job, to suddenly; we did
not see him so much. I felt like I had an endless day with two kids. I gave up work for that time,
and it was nine months, so I found that very stressful and difficult, not to be out with adults.
Before that, I took a year off when my son was born, but I only had one kid then. I had some
resentment, and I remember Kevin said to me, ‘your time will come; you will get your chance.
If we could just get through this, then I’ll pay you back’. I did not believe it one hundred
percent, and now, he has let me go and do a master’s degree and supported that for two years.

At the graduation, he was the valedictorian and I remember thinking, it is nice that they
get all the recognition, but what about us? I think they thank the families, but it was like, ‘you
must adapt around them’. At the time, I did not feel like they got that we are the backbone of
these people. I do not think any of them could do it without their supportive other. When I graduated, the dean had us clap for our families. I thought, that is so important, because they were there day-to-day; they were all great, all the time.

In those early years, I was irritated. I did not hide it either! I would say, ‘this sucks!’ I thought once the police academy was done, that training would be over, but there is still all this training to do! I would think, ‘You get more training?! You need more? Aren’t you trained?’

I knew there would be challenges. Early on, he would phone and say ‘I’m leaving soon’, but an hour and a half would mean soon. So we came down to a system where he would phone me when he was driving out of the gates. I think he felt this anxiety, so he would underestimate his time, and I would get really mad, like, ‘should I eat dinner without you, or wait?’ So I would wait, then the kids and I would get hungry! Then, he would be done at six, but something would happen. I was always blaming bad guys for wrecking our life. We would have plans or the kids would have a sports day, and he could not make it. So I tried not to tell them anytime he was coming, so that if he showed up, it would be like, ‘oh! Look!’ Rather than, ‘oh, he can’t come now’. The constant unpredictable circumstances were a drag.

Shift work was difficult on our family and his health. He was moodier and exhausted. We would be having a conversation and mid-sentence he is falling asleep. I realized, he had been up for 24 hours and half of it was on a nightshift and the other half was looking after three small children! I could see that was tough. The whole toddler stage of a marriage was the hardest part, plus no sleep, plus no time to yourselves, although it gave me the flexibility to work, where his three days off he could be at home. He told me about older members who say to him, ‘don’t come back to patrol, it will kill you’.

Kevin got a new position in the department in 2004, so the shift work stopped and we
noticed a huge difference. Our days were normal, we were in sync with the rest of the world, and he could adjust days where needed. In 2006, Kevin got on to [a specialized team]. That has been a change, because he has a pager now and there is more high-end stuff going on.

On the perceived impact of Kevin’s career on their marriage and family:

I think it is good and bad. He is doing what he loves, so you have someone who is not just punching the clock. We spend a lot of time talking about what he does; it takes up a lot of space. Hearing it does get taxing at times. I could teach a course on it! I cringe if people ask him what he does, because he will just go! I give him a look, like, okay, that is enough. Then I think, it is great someone is so passionate and intellectual, I am proud of him. He pushes the status quo, and that to me is an attractive quality in somebody. I did notice when we were away on holiday, that it took us getting out of our own country and being away for at least two weeks for him to detach. When we got home, he said, ‘I could retire tomorrow, I could leave it all behind.’ That made an impression on me; it must be very stressful to live in that world. It is like work rents space in his head. That is why I like travelling; it helps you get new perspectives.

He has got hand signals with our kids, which I did not know. If something bad is happening and he wants them to come to him, he will tap the top of his head. He has got another signal for ‘stay away from me’. They do not really think or talk about it, they just do it! They all know how to phone the right number and say, ‘my dad’s wearing this, he’s an off-duty cop…’ We do a lot of ‘what-if’ stuff; we have all got the little drill. I think he feels a heightened responsibility with his work, and he will possibly respond to something, so it keeps them safe.

Everybody in the neighbourhood comes to our house if something goes wrong. His job does not turn off, it is always on, but I am okay with that. It is not so invasive in everyday life. If he is there, I am shaking and panicking, and I defer to him, like, he is the cop, he knows what
to do. It seems like I am better under stress if he is not around, I just do my own thing.

We have an ever-present sense of security; it is part of who we are now. If we sit in a coffee shop, I know that he has to sit with his back so he can see the door. He would look around constantly, and I would say, ‘what is wrong with you?’ I automatically know now, he has situational awareness and I tested him once, I said, ‘look at me, and tell me who’s in the restaurant’. Without looking around, he could tell me everybody, exits, people, and he had his ops plan all ready to go!

A lot of people say to me, ‘aren’t you worried?’ I think, no, he is highly trained, and he is pretty hypervigilant in his day-to-day life. I trust all the guys there would put their own lives in front of his, or they would do anything they could to get him out of there if they had to. If somebody is going to do something, I have no control over that. Sometimes when he leaves in the morning, I say, ‘be careful’, which is dumb, because I know he is not a cowboy that is going to rush in to something, and they have all the gear. When he is able to, he will usually phone and say, ‘I’m safe’ or text me ‘all good’. Unless I hear otherwise, I assume everything is good.

Co-worker conflicts are probably the biggest stress, more than trauma on the job. It is not the blazing in with guns; it is the crazy co-workers. One guy in particular has dogged Kevin for years. He is a bully to some members, and they have very different philosophies. That was stressful, because I would hear about him all the time. After awhile, I said, ‘don’t just keep talking about it. You can only change you.’ I wanted to go up to the guy and go, ‘do you know what a knucklehead you are?’. I feel vicarious frustration, if there is such a term, but I am only getting one side of the story. Kevin is in a full-time job where he cannot control things, and that is a tough spot to be in. I try to be empathetic, but I am not under somebody’s thumb. He is getting a lot better at leaving it at the door, saying, ‘nope, that’s a frustration of mine at work’.
There is an old-boys school mentality, with this attitude of stuffing people down, and those that do support Kevin get shut down in their own way, and it drives him crazy! My sister says that he is an entrepreneurial spirit in a public system, and that is a hard thing to cage. I cannot do anything about it, I can just listen, but sometimes the frustration builds in me. I feel like marching in to the chief and saying, ‘I’ve been hearing about it for years!’ There are some awesome people on patrol and some great ones in management, but there is also this dark cloud that sits there. Somebody will piss Kevin off, and he will get eaten up inside about it. I think it takes a big mental toll, but he has only six more years, and he is good; it is like he does an attitude shift, and he makes himself busy.

Policing is such a physical job. A duty belt is so heavy, and Kevin comes home with a bleeding nose, or he got jumped on, twisted something, broke some glass; I do not know how their bodies take it constantly. Just this last week, he really wrecked his back. He was supposed to go away this weekend with my brother and he could not, he was walking around like he was 90. He had a really hard time because he said, ‘I have things to do!’ It is that constant to-do list. **On describing how she feels when Kevin discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:**

I find it fascinating. He has a lot of funny stories, and we talk about what was cool, how did you problem-solve, what did you find. I do not know if we brought this rule in later, or if he just knew this – I do not like hearing bad things about animals or kids. He usually censors those two things out, although occasionally if something good happened, he will tell me. I said to him, ‘that kind of stuff, even though it doesn’t stick to you, it sticks to me. Unless you need to talk about it, I don’t want to know about it’. I think he knows my tolerance for what I can handle. Most of the time he does tell me general things that happened. There was one situation where one of the people at the department phoned to say, ‘Kevin is going to be working late’. I kept
hearing on the news about this bad thing that happened, so I was worried, because normally he phones me. I thought, ‘that’s weird!’ Later, he said it was because he had to stay consistent with what he was doing, he could not phone. I had a moment of, ‘why is this person calling me? Is this bad?’ He has told me about some situations, like seeing people that hang themselves, but he is not really stressed about it, so I do not get stressed.

There was a guy who had been run over, and I remember him joking about it on the phone with a co-worker. I later said to him, ‘that’s somebody’s dad or brother. I’m not sure how you can joke about that’. He said, ‘that’s the way we cope, is to joke about it’. I guess the cops call it black humour. That did not sit well with me, but now I get it, I hear it more, and they do not do it in public. It is a harsh thing. If somebody commits suicide and they jump off a bridge, they talk about ‘hang time’, and you think, geez! I think they care, but they try to depersonalize it and keep themselves separated from it. Harder for me, that would stick to me and I would not be able to let it go. That is why he does what he does, and I do what I do.

Describing her observations of Kevin’s coping strategies for operational stress:

They get what they need when they need it. They had a psychologist in, and they do debrief the hard things. Again, they joke around a lot. They cannot talk to the public, so they talk amongst each other. He usually tells me directly, and then I feel it out by listening to how he is talking on the phone. There is a lot of criticizing the people that do not do things the way they should be done, which is good, because you learn from it before someone gets hurt.

He talks about preparation and situational awareness. He said it is not about being paranoid; it is about ‘am I prepared so I can relax?’ He carries a backpack with him all the time with stuff in it, he is like a really good boy scout, and has a lot of ‘when…then’ thinking, not ‘if…then’. We have talked a number of times about not wearing headphones when you are out
anywhere. I wore them once, and he really got mad, and said ‘well, that’s just stupid, you’re just asking for it.’ Sometimes I will adjust if it is not that important to me but it is to him, and he seems to do the same for me. I never wear headphones out anymore because it drives him crazy.

He says he cannot control what happens, but he can control his response. Autogenic breathing he says really helps, I call it yoga breathing! He uses it on calls, and says everything becomes all calm. Then having a good team, training a lot together, and knowing that somebody will cover you. He says on patrol, you do not always trust everybody, and that is stressful, like if somebody really had to step up, could they do it? Would he want this guy to have his back?

*On coping individually with stress, and information shared by Kevin about the job:*

Fitness for me is big, I run a lot. Communicating, I like to know what is going on, when and how. I talk to other people, and that helps me cope, usually my sister. I have a good support system.

One nice thing that we have done a couple of times is Kevin’s [specialized work team] will offer information to spouses. We all get more familiar with their work, and gain a better appreciation. I think that would be a nice support group, but I am not friends with other wives or husbands of cops unless I am at an event with regular people that I see every year and we talk.

*On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:*

I have a thing about constantly communicating. That was new to him, but that is the way my family works. I talk to my siblings all the time everyday, it is just the way we are. When texting came out, it was awesome! It works really well, and he is good, he texts me! It is not an ideal way to communicate, but if you have a good foundation, then a bit of encouragement or something funny, I like that.

We have a plan for if something goes really bad. If Kevin was killed on-duty, I know
what would happen next and what I would do. I even chose who would come to my house to tell me the bad news, and they actually have it on file somewhere. If this one guy shows up later at night, I will know what is going on. I also hope that the guys on his shift would give me the heads up. I have all their phone numbers in my cell phone if I ever need them.

We have different last names, mostly because I did not like his last name, but he keeps things as separate as he can, so a lot of people do not even know we are a couple. I think it is two-fold. One is if somebody was trying to hurt his family, it would be harder to find us. He puts the department address on his driver’s license. They do not like him doing that, but he does it anyways. The other is a legal thing, about if we got sued or something.

We do a lot of fitness, and it is a good outlet. There is one guy on his team who does Pilates and yoga, another guy is starting to, and I took Kevin. I had to force him to go, but he really liked it, and said it is so nice to just have an empty mind. I guess their minds are going a mile a minute. I think they are starting to see the benefits, like the football players that do ballet!

When somebody gave me a study about how there are so many divorces when one person does a master’s, I remember thinking, no; I am not going to let that happen. I think we both went the extra mile to make sure it did not; I would say that it strengthened our relationship. We talk about having white space – what to take off the calendar, and what to not put back on. We are both bad for that. I think we might need to get away more, it is easier to decompress, just expensive. We both use a lot of humour, it is a good diffuser, and we go to a coffee shop almost every night and talk. I said, ‘one therapy session would cost that much added up over a month. So we could either spend it there, or go for coffee.’ It is a conscious effort to connect.

The houses that we bought, that is our project, our shared dream. For a while, we did not tell anybody, so it was our little sneaky thing that we were doing. It is long-term, we have a
goal, and I hope it will help with retirement so that when we both want to stop, we can.

Coping things that he may never have thought of doing, maybe that has been my influence, like yoga. I have tried occasionally to get him to go to a counsellor to talk with somebody who is there just for you, but I think he thinks you have to have quite a problem. He is getting better at saying no, and not taking things on quite as much. He cares about the members so he spends time making sure they have all the right equipment. He seems to channel that energy into making things happen. I do not think it has changed much over the years.

He talks about post-crisis stress, and took a course on it, things like eat regularly, exercise, and find someone to talk to. Nothing really bad has ever happened to him yet, like the sort of police crisis that rocks somebody’s world. He said, ‘maybe it will, and maybe I won’t be able to handle it – maybe I will have a reaction, I don’t know.’ I think he is as prepared as he can be. I do not know if some incidents would be overwhelming for other people; he has seen some bad accidents, and come across quite a few off-duty. We were together for one and I was scared about what we were going to see, I was expecting dead bodies. It did not even faze him.

On talking with Kevin in preparation for the life story interview, and after the interview:

He did say, ‘given what we both do for a living, perhaps we’re more prepared than other people’. We talked about what would work, what does and does not work, like a state of the nation, are we doing what we need to be doing here. Everybody has to work in a marriage, and we keep working. We had some rough spots early on, and figured it out. We decided we are good, we agree that we like each other, we enjoy being together, and we enjoy our kids too.

Kevin got into policing when we had two little kids. Like any couple, any amount of little kids is stressful. I do not know if any new job would have made it stressful, or the fact that he was doing a job and I was not at the time. I want to be able to work and contribute too.
want a balanced partnership, and he never had that attitude of ‘you must stay home’.

We seem to need that balance of having lives outside of what we have together, but you have to carve out the specific time. Most of our social network is our kids’ friends’ parents. We are pretty good friends with our neighbours. If we have get-togethers, it is usually with my siblings. We all like each other so we have a good time, and sometimes we go on holidays together. A lot of our social network is my friends. Kevin will have situational friends, where they are close, but then he does not talk to them anymore. I said, ‘it would be good if you had friends that are long-term. If I died, what would you do? Where is your support network?’ He said, ‘it’s your network, that would be my support network’. I said, ‘well, I am glad I can provide that for you!’ With the [specialized work team], they go out once in awhile, but I have to say, ‘why don’t you phone them up and go?’ He will, but he would not think about doing it on his own. He will have a great time and it is usually just them, never any spouses. His one good friend is the guy that he works with regularly. They have the same philosophy of how to do things in policing. They have been friends for years but they do not necessarily get together. A lot of times too, living where we do, we are far away from everybody else.

Kevin said a lot of other wives worry about nightshifts, I am not sure why, I do not. Also about working with the opposite sex so often, rightly so, because there are a lot of broken marriages and affairs going on. I know some that are going on right now and there are people that have had multiple things. I remember once he got close to this one woman on his shift but honestly, it did not bother me at all. He is a friendly guy, and I thought, hmm, someone could misinterpret that. I guess it is about trust too. Do you trust your partner? I do, unless I have a reason not to. I think if anything was going to happen, it would have already and we have weathered the storm, and things are good. Who knows? Anything can happen in life.
Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:

Kevin told me a lot of cops say, ‘I won’t tell my husband or wife because they can’t handle it.’ I would say, I think they can handle more than you think. Talk to people about what is going on in your job, so it is not a big mystery. I went and watched training sessions, and that helped me to get a picture of what they do, so it gives me confidence.

If I am stressed, I am trying to talk to Kevin and do not feel like I am getting anywhere, I will phone up a couple of his friends. So whom can you call on? To realize it does not have to be me; I just need to find ways to get him support - someone who knows the job and the person.

When our kids were really young, we did not take the time to go out together because it cost too much money or it was too hard with babysitters. I would say find whatever way you are comfortable with, it does not have to be extravagant, just go for coffee or a walk, and just check in throughout the day. It is the day-to-day little things that matter more than the big stuff.

Describing the involvement of spouses at the Justice Institute recruit training family day:

It was like they were predicting and saying, ‘you will be in trouble in your marriage’. I rejected it; do not tell me that, we are going to be just fine. Maybe it was super great information for young cops and young couples, but it felt patronizing, because Kevin went into policing as a more mature person. I think them reading information is good. I just leave things on the counter, and then he picks it up and goes, ‘oh, what is this all about?’

On hopes and dreams for the future as a couple:

He has only six years until retirement, and we have plan A, B, and C, but it is so hard. You try to do your best five years before you retire. Then, do you work again or not? On one hand, he says, ‘well of course, I will just do training’. On another hand, he wants to go work on the lift at Whistler, just to do something different.
Cathy’s story

Background

Cathy, 41, and Steve, 38, have been together as a couple for 17 years, and married for 15. Neither of them was married previously, and they got married prior to Steve becoming a police officer. Cathy has two adult children from a previous relationship. Steve has been serving as a constable with the RCMP for two and a half years, and Cathy is a family counsellor.

On establishing themselves as a couple (moving in, getting married, etc.):

We met in August of 1995. A friend thought he was perfect for me, and I had seen a picture of him. I looked at him from across a group of people at a fundraiser and said to a friend, ‘look at that guy over there! I’m going to marry him.’ I knew immediately. I went up to him; he looked up and recognized me. We said hello and agreed to get together, then started dating and just really took our time; it was a really nice courtship. He was staying over a lot, then we officially moved in, and he was building a relationship with the boys. He proposed to me on Mother’s Day, and we got married two years later in Vegas. My youngest son gave Steve a run for his money. Steve set some very clear boundaries, and it was good, so they liked him.

Steve’s family did not yell or scream, they were very proper, and they did not talk much. I grew up in a home where you lay your emotions out, deal with them and carry on. It was a big change for him; we had to balance each other out. He supported me through everything and anything. Even my dream of moving to the States and working – he kept the boys and kept the house. It was supposed to be for a year, but was only for three months. Before I met him, I was getting ready to go. When we met, it was a big decision – do I stay and see if this relationship works, or do I go? I thought if I left, the relationship would not have lasted. Steve was mindful of that, saying, ‘when the time is right, you can go.’ At that time, in early 2002, he said, ‘at one
point, I want to be a detective.’ It had always been in the back of his mind, but he wanted to wait until we were more financially stable and the kids were grown.

When my mom young, she lived up in Prince George and went to residential school. She told me that two RCMP members there raped her and her best friend. When Steve told me what he wanted to do, I said, ‘you want to be what?’ It made me upset. I said, ‘you can’t be a cop, do you know what they have done to First Nations people, and to my mom? How could I be proud of you?’ We worked through that, and my mom loves him to bits.

On Steve pursuing a career in policing, and coping with the transition to the new career:

Steve is very talented, and he was at the top of his career in the media industry. He wanted to perfect his craft, and he did very well, but there was no chance of movement up or down, just sideways, and he did not want to do that for the rest of his life. About four years ago, Steve started the RCMP application process, and there are a lot of steps. Fortunately he has always lived in the Lower Mainland, has only had one job, and does not have a criminal record or even a speeding ticket, but he did not think they would ever accept him. The boys were out of the house and we were empty nesters, which was bizarre, because I was so used to being a mom. All of a sudden, I thought, ‘oh my gosh, my husband is going to be a cop! No one is ever going to want to talk to me!’ The boys thought it was cool and they were supportive, even though they were dabbling and trying out different things, and we said, ‘ok guys, you can’t be doing that’.

Steve started exercising, he went from being a couch potato to having to run and lift weights to increase his speed, and he was very motivated. He was also on a site called 10-62.com. It breaks it down for people in the application stage, after depot, being married, and other things. It was neat because I could chat with other partners about my fears. He supported me during my education, so I was very supportive; I was excited to see him become involved in
something very passionately. I thought it was a big self-esteem boost for him. I know how unhappy I have been working at different organizations, but at least I have an opportunity to go elsewhere. In the media industry, your resources are very small, and he was making a lot of money. He said, ‘if I do get accepted, my pay is going to be cut in half and you will be making more than me’. So we started saving at that time too, just in case, because he did not want our quality of life to change. I said, ‘it’s just money. If we have to downsize our house, no big deal.’ You do not find out until six months into training at depot where you are going to be posted, so that was scary. You can be posted anywhere in Canada, and that is what they say when you sign the papers, so it is an adventure! I thought, well, we will go wherever we need to go!

When he went to depot, I was here working. In our house, we have my mother living upstairs with us and we have a suite downstairs that his mother lives in. His mom is independent; she is well past 65 and still has to work, which is really sad. We took my mom in, because she needed a level of care that my sister could not provide with her young little ones. We had the room, the time, and the resources, so it was not a problem. My mom is in her 70’s, she is blind from macular degeneration, she has osteoporosis, and she has had hip operations and a knee operation. So I turned my focus from my marriage, because Steve was doing his thing. I had to support him and have him know that I was taking care of the house and the moms, because they were worried about him. It irked me, I thought, ‘no, I need you to worry about me! He’s got his troop, and all this training; he has lots to keep him busy.’ That was the tough part, and of course the money, we really had to watch our budget.

He was one of the older guys in the troop and they lived in dorms, so he went from being married to living with 30 young guys and all the craziness that goes along with that. He shook his head going, ‘what have I gotten myself into? I don’t want to be here!’ He cried, oh my gosh,
he cried! I said, ‘you can’t come back! We’ve worked too hard to get you there, you’re staying. Just stay, cry, I don’t care what you do, you’re staying.’ Because Steve was the oldest, all of the young guys would come to him for support and guidance. He said, ‘my god, they’re like little children! I can’t believe they’re giving guns to some of these guys!’ The big decision came about six weeks into it, because he had taken all of his vacation time. We waited to see if his work would give him a leave of absence for two weeks, which he was hoping because he had worked there for years. They would not give it to him, so he quit! He did really well in training; he became the valedictorian and got the highest marks out of his troop, so it makes me proud.

The whole family went to Steve’s graduation. They had a family part where they talked about dealing with only ten percent of the population, which was pounded over and over our heads. They put families at ease about, okay, your guy has been trained, it is not what you think it is, it is very different. That really helped, because we were all bug-eyed! They are trained in physical safety; they have the rest of their team and the detachment to support them. They have to be really strong to be able to go to isolated posts, which we did not have to do, thank god. It was interesting to see all the cadets up there; it was all about them, not the families. It was very strange, like we were all invisible. It was a two-day affair, then it was finished, and they all went their separate ways.

When Steve first came out of depot, they sent him to another city for his first posting. We were wondering why, because if you have a really strong cadet like Steve, they would send you back to the Lower Mainland, because you already have a home, you are already established. He thought maybe it had to do with his media connection; he knew everybody and everybody knew him. Who knows, there are politics within the RCMP, and how they do things sometimes does not make any sense. When he had to transfer, he brought his gun home in his
lockbox, and it just freaked me right out. I was like, ‘take it away! Get it out!’ I do not like them at all, but the kids thought it was really cool.

Steve wrote a letter stating his case to come back, and they made a position for him here. He is a good cop, he is not lazy, he is really thorough in his notes, and goes above and beyond. A lot of the young constables, maybe they are not as lazy as they are afraid. Being older has made a big difference for Steve, as he has more life experience and a bigger worldview. Steve was a ballet dancer for the majority of his life. His mom taught dance, and he was the youngest student to ever attend the National, and he was very gifted. He is a cop, a cameraman, and a ballet dancer! I used to joke that he was stealing all my tights, and now he is this manly man!

He is at investigative interview training right now in Chilliwack. He is not sure what he wants to do in the force yet, but that kind of stuff is amazing for him. He enjoys the challenge in policing. The shiftwork is really hard, and graveyard shifts are brutal. That switchover is tough on the body, but you exercise and keep in the best shape possible so your body can handle it.

*On the perceived impact of Steve’s career on their marriage and family:*

There is some positive, some negative. It is tough to arrange family get-togethers because his shifts fluctuate. There are whole weekends that I do not see him, or I see him for a second, and then he will go to bed. I have to keep the house quiet, and other days, if I am working and he is home, then we just see each other in the evening, and I am too tired to want to go out and do anything since I have to get up and go to work the next day. It can be really hard, because when he is off, no one else is, or vice-versa.

It is a lot more serious in the way we communicate with each other. So much has been happening in the news, that he debriefs with me some of the things that he comes home with, but it is scary and sad. A shift happened; now there are deeper conversations, going, ‘eww, wow,
yuck! How did that make you feel? How did it affect your partner and the whole team?’ You hear these horror stories, and then you hear horrible stories in the news about rogue cops, but you only get one part of the story, so that is frustrating.

At the end of four days where it has been really busy, dealing with bad guys all the time does take a toll, and Steve does not want to talk, he just wants to de-stress and not think. It is all about him when he comes home. I do not feel like I can talk about my crummy day, there is no support or concern there, he will go, ‘yeah, yeah, that’s nice’, because he is dealing with all his own stuff. One of Steve’s troop mates was a complete idiot at depot, he still is and the whole detachment hates him. Steve has a lot of patience, but it does get to him. He can only give so much that when he comes home, he says, ‘I don’t want to hear about your day at work. I don’t want to hear about you having trouble with a particular client and their children. Don’t ask me another question about it, that’s not my job. My job is to keep the peace and this is what I know about the law.’ I say, ‘okay, well, I’m leaving you alone. I’ll wait until you’re ready to come back around and we can go off and do something, or be present with one another.’ Some days are worse than others. He does come back around and it takes him awhile sometimes to talk about what is bothering him, it is all so confidential. I say, ‘Steve, I know the other husbands are talking to their wives. I’m not going to meet these people, I don’t know their names, I have no pictures of them, I don’t even know what day it happened.’ I go home and debrief with him too, but there is not a lot of that, not the way it used to be when he was in media.

They have their own lingo and jokes, and it feels weird for me, because that is not my circle. Even with his friends, they include me, but when he is with other officers, they have their own little clique, and they do not let a lot of people into that. Steve will talk about it, but it is like a whole separate marriage he has, so that is hard. He still has all his classmates, they are all
talking to one another and have been since graduation, and I am only finding out about it a year and a half later! I say, ‘it hurts Steve, I’m your wife!’ They are tight, because they are going to take a bullet for each other if push comes to shove. It is about life and death, and only they can experience it. I get that, he gets that, but it is still very separate.

There is ickiness and sadness out there. Drinking and driving surprised both of us. Now that we have almost zero tolerance, people are still doing it! They should be locked up for being dumb! You get so frustrated, and officers have to go to homes and say, ‘your daughter/ son/ brother is dead because of this person drinking and driving/ texting/ talking on the phone’, or whatever the case may be. It is awful, and it gets to Steve.

You are lost at what to do, what is going to be the right thing to say? Do you say, ‘you’re isolating yourself’? If you put that pressure on them, they are going to snap, and you do not want to push in that sense. You let them go a little bit, and then say, ‘why don’t we go and do this?’ Then it is like, ‘well, I don’t feel like doing anything, urgh.’ So I have to let him figure it out on his own. If I push, I know it is just going to cause a fight, and I do not want to argue, because I have my own stuff to deal with as well with clients. I have my co-workers that I can talk to, but they talk and leave, they are not my husband that I go home to everyday. We are going to go for therapy, just to bring us back together, to get us to a safe place. I cannot wait until he gets back to his office next week and gets that going. That is really important for both of us. There is one woman that he has to speak to, to find out how he goes about it, and I hate that. There is not a lot of privacy around it, so that is disturbing. It is not fair, because there is a view that they are tough and strong, and they can handle things, they do not need to go to a counsellor. With my extended family plan, you call a number, so you do not have to talk to anybody. He is not ashamed of it, it is just awkward to ask, but we need to deal with his isolation, and where we
go from here, somebody who can deal specifically with police officers. A lot of the old-school
guys, they just did not do that. That is when suicides would happen, burnout, and then the rogue-
ness would begin. They do not have the tools or support, and then it turns into posttraumatic
stress disorder and we know what that does to people, it starts a vicious cycle. They are trying to
make it less dehumanizing, but they still have a long way to go. It is something that Steve knows
he has to own; he has to be proactive. It has to be something he walks through. It can be lonely;
because nobody else gets it, unless Steve’s friend who is a member is there, and his wife is there,
so they can talk their police talk, and then her and I can talk about us, and let them do their thing.

I have not met any of the other spouses. Steve does not want to bring so much of his
work home, or have it become his whole life. I hear crazy stories about some of the other
people, and some of the things that have gone on, so I do not need them any closer to me. It is
interesting; we have to be so careful with where we live. People know who we are, and if bad
guys find out, who knows, anything can happen. Everything has to be very confidential.

Neighbours come up and ask, ‘how do we deal with this?’ Co-workers do the same thing, and I
say, ‘don’t talk to me about my husband. Talk about me! Ask me how my day is going!’ Steve
says he is never really off-duty, especially being an RCMP member; he is on all the time. I
thought that was a weird concept, but that is just the way it is.

On describing how she feels when Steve discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:

I am his wife, and I wait for those phone calls, even if it is a text in a minute, like, just
text me and let me know you are okay. You just do not know, there are a lot of crazy people out
there. I get that, he gets that, and most police officers get it. About a month ago, a drunk driver
hit Steve. Usually he gives me a call to say, ‘I’m coming home’ or ‘I’m going to be late’ or ‘I
have to write reports’ or whatever. So he phoned and said, ‘before anyone calls you, I’ve been
hit by a drunk driver’. I said, ‘what? You were hit in your patrol car?’ His boss could smell liquor on the guy’s breath. The guy said to everybody, ‘I just had two blocks to go; I didn’t want to leave my car. I need it for work!’

There was another incident that freaks me out. Steve was pulling over a woman for speeding, and saw a gun on the back floor as he was walking up. He took his gun out saying, ‘okay, I could be shot here.’ This woman freaked out at him, like, ‘what is your problem? It’s a toy gun!’ Well, he does not know that! He has to keep calm and keep his wits all about him. People driving by were yelling obscenities, like, ‘leave her alone!’ It makes me mad, and he said it was scary. Coming across people who have passed away is very sad for him as well, going in and seeing someone’s parent or grandparent, all alone. Steve is very practical, where this is how life is, but they never know what they are up against, and Steve says ‘it’s nerve-wracking’. They are as prepared as they can be, but you still have to have that high level of alertness.

*Describing her observations of Steve’s coping strategies for operational stress:*

He has exercise, his friends, and just being brain-dead when he comes home. They are hypervigilant, so when they come home, it is a big crash. He is aware of that, and they have been taught about it. He lets it go for a while, and then says, ‘okay, I have to stop’. We will have a night in, and then he exercises. Exercising is really important.

He started to notice that he does not want to be around people. He said, ‘I don’t want to go out, I don’t want to go to a restaurant, I don’t want to go see my friends. It’s like I’m depressed, but I’m not, I just don’t want to be around the public.’ And because we live in [name of city], and he works in [name of city], we cannot really go anywhere because he knows where all the good and bad people are, and it is his working area, which is not good. If we have to go shopping, we go in, get the job done, and get out as fast as we can. Then, if we want to travel
anywhere, it costs a lot of money and we are dealing with traffic and people, and he does not want to be around that. So I say, for example, ‘let’s go to Stanley Park. Most of the people there are not going to be bad guys. They’re going to be people who are jogging, walking their dogs, it’s just a happy place to be’, keeping in mind that the ten percent is not the entire population. He has to remind himself of that, and not get in the habit of being a recluse.

Years before Steve became a cop, friends started whittling away because a lot of them could not grow up, but family has always been very close. Steve has really close friends, a handful of people. They are supportive with lots of jokes, and they do a lot of golf and geeky things together. I do not, so I say, ‘yeah, go out with your friends. You need a break from being married at this moment’. He has gained a lot of new acquaintances through the force as well. They keep in contact with texting, which is good, because they can bounce ideas off each other and say, ‘have you dealt with this or that, or how are you doing this?’ They were a tight troop.

When he was in media, he would film some pretty horrific things, but it was through a lens, so he saw the world in black and white, and he did not have to be directly involved. Now, his mind has had to shift to dealing with people. There are some sad stories, and some goofy stories as well. That is where his friends come in, to blow off steam. Sarcastic humour has been the biggest way that we have dealt with it. I have all the inside jokes of who they called what and how they deal with it, but it does take some getting used to. I come from a different field, where I am trying to empower people. Not to say that we do not get sarcastic too when we are banging our heads and trying to help, but he does not have that emotional attachment to them.

Sometimes it bothers him because he has to be so detached with some of the people he deals with. It gets tiresome for him when he has had a long shift going from call to call, it can be like glorified babysitting for general members, it makes him insane. He said he never thought in
a million years it would be like that, because our perception of cops is catching the bad guy. Well no, it is going to disputes in homes with a mom and child, breaking up house parties, looking for missing persons, doing a wellness check, pulling people over for speeding or something bizarre. Some mental health cases, in the sense that we do not have the services, are frustrating for officers as well. He says, ‘I can’t change the system, I’m here to do the best job I possibly can, and keep people safe.’ It is about keeping everybody safe, including the bad guys, from themselves! Calls where children are involved make officers so mad, especially him, and he says, ‘how can people do this to their kids?’

Some of the older members say, ‘you’re only dealing with ten percent of the population, and you’re going to see the same thing over and over again, so make sure you have a healthy life outside of here. Make sure you hang out with healthy people, because that will help balance it out. Do de-stressing activities, continue with your exercise regime.’ Also, have honesty and integrity, which makes Steve and his co-workers mad, because there are officers who do not, and it makes them all cringe, going, ‘we’re not all bad! We really care! We’re here to keep you all safe!’ Just because the media decides to show one thing, they do not show the other hundred things that officers are doing. When Steve gets a chance to do something nice, like giving someone a warning, he says, ‘it helps boost the public image, because good news travels fast.’ It makes him feel good to do small things like that.

There is one officer who is an idiot, he is an older member, and should not be working. He is part of the old-school boys’ club, of the way they used to police. There are not a lot of places that you can go to complain when he does stupid things. Steve is very lucky that he has not had to deal with this officer directly, but there is crossover sometimes. The majority of young constables want to do the job to the best of their abilities, and clean up the public
perception of police. Because Steve was in media, he sees the other side now of why police do not tell the public or reporters information. There are two sides to every story, but the police cannot tell their side because of going to court, and the media is always going to give the public what the public wants. But I am the public, and I do not want that, I never have!

I cannot stress enough how intelligent Steve is. It would be a shame if he stayed in general duty forever. He is so good with clients, even when they are being absolutely crazy. He says it is hard to deal with people all the time. He takes his time to build rapport, and he says, ‘it’s funny; it is a tricky thing to do when you are in general duty. You are being a cop to keep people safe, keep the criminals safe even, but you are also attending to some of their emotional needs at the same time.’ He takes it upon himself that we need to do more, we need more services, and everyone is stretched so far. There is all that pressure to make sure your reports are written right, because if they are not, that guy is going to get off, or we know this guy is a pedophile, and if we do the wrong paperwork...It is a very fine line that they walk, and they try to remember all of the things that are taught as well about take care of yourself, exercise, do not isolate, and talk with your co-workers. I like it when he talks. He has good friends on his shift right now, they get along well, and they can banter back and forth. I think of how the politics can affect a team. On Steve’s team, he dealt with this younger member and told him, ‘whatever your watch commander said, don’t let it get you down, just carry on. You know you’re doing a good job; you’re doing everything that you can do. He’s not going to be there forever.’ I was impressed with Steve to give that insight and support; it made them even more cohesive.

On coping individually with stress, and information shared by Steve about the job:

I talk to my co-workers, because they are always checking in. We all have our own life challenges, and they were there with me when Steve was going through depot, saying, ‘he’s
going to be a cop! Do you know how stressful that is?’ I said, ‘I think I know’, but I did not have any idea. No matter how much you hear or read, you do not know until you experience it.

My co-workers were very supportive during the six months he was gone, when he was working in [name of city], and happily relieved when he was finally back here.

He was working in [name of city] for a year and a half. He would drive down and it was hard, but you do what you have to do. I would be there for his phone calls every night, but it was odd when he first came home, because he was not the same. He was more self-assured when he came back from depot. He was only home for four or five days before we had to find a place for him in [name of city]. It was a big change for him as well because he came home, then had to go and be on his own, meet new friends, new co-workers, learn a whole new city, and they are still on field training for six months with another person, then all the paperwork, it is overwhelming. When he was in [name of city], it was good because he could focus, and I could get used to seeing him on the weekend. When he was home it was awkward, because it was like, ‘wow, you’re different! Your self-esteem has increased, you carry yourself differently.’ And he looks at the world differently as well! He is so much more observant of people’s actions and body movements, and he checks around corners, because it is drilled into them over and over about safety. We would be coming out of a coffee shop, he would stop and look, and I would say, ‘what are you looking for?’ He would say, ‘I don’t know! You just check when you’re going around the corner, because when you’re in uniform, you don’t know if someone is waiting for you’. Quirky things that he did not even know he was doing. It made me more observant too.

On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:

He is a lot more cautious about everything. It is not just hypervigilance, he is more aware of and sensitive to the people around him, and his surroundings. If we have a family dinner now,
there had better be a good reason, and he needs to know who is coming over, because in my sister’s family, there are people who have been in jail and who are still. I said, ‘Steve, they’re doing what they need to be doing, otherwise we wouldn’t have them in our lives.’

On their coping strategies as a couple – described at the follow-up interview:

We are working on Steve’s emotional detachment. We are both in counselling, and through the RCMP benefits, we found someone who is fantastic. He has worked with a lot of paramedics and police, and he does debriefing after critical incidents. My husband is very detached and not emotional, so he is working and struggling at it, because the counsellor was saying, ‘yeah, it’s good for your job, not good for your marriage!’ So how do you balance that? He is becoming more aware of his own feelings. Their hypervigilance is so high, that when he finally does come off shift, he says, ‘I just want to go to sleep, I’m done’, and he vegs out on his days off for the first little while. It is tough, and I did not realize that it was such a problem until the last couple of months, now I understand. He is very conscious of it now, and says, ‘how’s your day, how are things going?’ I am like, ‘ok, it’s going fine. Now enough, now you’re asking too much!’ It is a big change, but it is a lot better, because we feel like more of a team, we are both on the same page. He is arresting the bad guys, and I am trying to help parents be better parents, so that their kids do not become people that he arrests when they are older!

We are coping by doing activities together, other than watching TV. We live beside a park now, which makes it easier. Now we have baseball gloves, and we are looking at getting boxing gloves. Even golfing, I want to have fun, and I know I am not going to do it properly. Steve does not care, he thinks, ‘you’re having fun, good.’ We are playing a lot more tennis now, and biking, so doing activities away from home, because we have both our moms at home, and that is a lot of stress. It is going well, we have a lot of fun! We have a trip coming up, so that is...
more of our de-stressing. We do not need to deal with the house, the moms, the dogs, or work; we will just go off and have fun. We make it a habit not to talk about work, and just be engaged.

In the beginning, you do not think about all the stresses. You do what you have to do, and then you start arguing over really dumb things. The kids would laugh, but I was like, ‘come on, this isn’t funny, this is serious.’ We never fought about money, but we would argue about other things. Now that he is in the job he is in, it is important to us to have that down-time with each other, and also away from each other, and to be more aware of it, like, ‘it was a really rough week, what can I do to help?’ That is a huge change, because before, the laundry needed to be done, the kids were acting up, and I still had a paper to write, and he would say, ‘I’m going to a movie with friends’, and be out the door. It is not like that anymore. With his change to policing, things had to change, because otherwise it would just be two people sharing a house, and not being a couple, especially with the four days on and four days off. When they happen on weekends, we do not see each other at all, which is good sometimes!

Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:

Counselling is so important, just to have that third person saying, ‘hey, what’s going on? What’s changed, and how do you deal with it?’ I do not know how these young families do it; it is a lot of stress. That is where 10-62.com came in, it was really helpful because you could post saying, ‘I really miss him!’ and get a response saying, ‘this is what you’re going to experience and this is okay, make sure you do something for yourself’, that was the big thing that was recommended. I exercised and it was good, because I did something healthy and productive. Then, he did not come right home after six months, which was even more crushing. You have to re-arrange your schedule and life and people are always asking, ‘how is it?’ There is only so much information you can give to co-workers, because if the wrong thing gets out to somebody,
it is going to come back, so there are those constraints as well.

*Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for the police organization:*

Be more open. I do not know about public oversight of the police, because there are things that the public does not need to know about police procedures, because it makes it unsafe for officers and other first responders. They do not know what it is like to be a cop; they do not go through the training. I am married to one and walk every step with him, and I still have no idea. Be more accountable, when you have bad apples, get rid of them! Do not keep them on or put them on desk duty, my god. It makes it awful for the good guys, and the media is always going to gravitate to the bad apples. If you have bad management and they are in positions of power, get rid of them! What is this loyalty? It devastates members.

*On her hopes and dreams for the future with Steve:*

To eventually have a home to ourselves. It sounds awful, but if the moms need more care than they require now, then they have to go into a home, because we do not have the time to do it. We are hoping now that he has his career on the go that I can pick up where I left off, so for me to have my own practice, and for Steve be in the career that he wants.
**Joan’s story**

**Background**

Joan and Jack met in high school, and have been together for 36 years, and married for 31 years. They are both 53 years old, and have one child. They got married immediately prior to Jack becoming a police officer with a municipal department. Jack has worked as a police constable for the past 31 years at two different departments over the course of his career, and specialized in traffic reconstruction. Joan works full-time as a city employee, interacting with individuals and families from the community. Shortly after the follow-up interview for this research project, Jack retired from policing.

*On establishing themselves as a couple (meeting, getting married, moving in, having kids, etc.):*

In the 70’s, we were dating and going to school. We had some classes together, and Jack had actually been dating a friend of mine. They broke up, and somehow he noticed me, and he just kept showing up at my work! Eventually we started dating, and the rest is history!

Right after high school, Jack went to military college for a year, and there was only snail-mail, so we had to correspond a lot but we got through it. He then came and joined me at the local college, then out at UBC. He decided that university life was not for him, so he got a job, we got engaged, and after I graduated with my Bachelor of Arts, we got married!

Once we decided to get married and move in, Jack got an apartment. We were both brought up traditionally, agreed with our parents’ values, and did not live together before we got married. We made wedding plans, he was working, and somewhere in the back of our minds, we knew it was not going to be his career. He was not sure what he wanted to do, and I was going through to be a teacher.

We realized he would not be getting summer vacations for a while. A new position
opened up at my work, so I said, ‘why don’t I take that for awhile?’ Then I could start my teaching career after we had some time together. Then somehow, I never left my work. We started seeing friends get married and have kids, and I realized in teaching, you cannot go to your kids’ fieldtrips and do all those things. In my work, I am fortunate. I can take half a day off, or a day off. I do not have to take my vacation in full weeklong blocks, so we started thinking if we have kids, this would work out really well. That did not happen, and I was busy going to so many doctors’ appointments, that I did not want to think about changing careers.

In the 80’s, we spent a lot of time camping and fishing. He was with the police department going through training, so met a lot of people, and had a lot of adventures with them. Unfortunately, we were still going through infertility. That is strange; usually it does not bother me [becoming teary]. We were told we could not have kids, and we almost split up because I did not think it was fair to him. We sold our four-door car and did all those things and it was like, ‘ok, we can get through not having kids’.

Things fell into place, and then all of a sudden, surprise! Ten years later, we had our daughter in 1990. I thought about quitting to stay home, but with Jack, they work 12-hour shifts, four days on, four days off. So we thought that was doable. I had all this money in my pension, because I had been with the company 15 years at that time. So, to give that up was maybe not the wisest thing. We weighed all those odds, and decided I would stay working. He loved being home on his four days off with her, and it worked out really well. So, we figured out why it took ten years. We have a livewire, she is a bungy-jumper and motocross racer, and we would not have had patience for her, we were in our twenties, there was no way! She started doing things like dancing, then she was into rock-climbing for a long time, yeah, the gray hair! Because we started working at a young age, we had a lot of seniority, we were able to juggle things, and I do
not think there were many fieldtrips or events that we missed. We did not consciously plan it, but everything fell into place eventually! Things work out for a purpose, and it was all good.

For awhile, we had the apartment, then my parents were thinking about retiring, they wanted to travel, and they had a big empty house. They said if we wanted to, we could have the self-contained suite. That was a win-win situation for a couple of years, because we looked after the house when they were away, and helped them out with cutting grass and stuff like that. Then we moved because it was closer for me for work.

In the 90’s, we were looking after my parents, they both passed away with terminal illnesses. When they were diagnosed, my brother was living in the Queen Charlottes at the time. He decided to move down, and we said, ‘well, why don’t we buy a house together?’ So we set up here, and he came down to help look after Mom and Dad, and lived with us for six or seven years, it was really nice.

Our daughter was growing up, and we did a lot of things with her, we went cruising up and down the coast, and took advantage of family time. In the 2000’s, we got more of our life back. We were not looking after family, except we had a niece in the hospital with two bouts of leukemia, and we were helping out there. Our daughter started racing down in the states, and we spent more time with that. She graduated; we had our 25th anniversary, and just more family time. Now, starting last year, it is like another chapter, we started taking our first trips together since we had our daughter. We spent a week up in Haida Gwaii. The plane landed, Jack looked out and said, ‘I could retire here!’ I was like, ‘you haven’t even gotten off the plane dear!’ But I had to agree with that, it was gorgeous, and so low-key, we had a wonderful time. I am looking forward to more things like that! We still do family stuff, our daughter likes coming with us, and it is a little bit unusual, but good. We are fortunate that we enjoy doing various similar things.
There are things that we do separately which are nice, because then we have more to talk about, and we need our own space and interests.

We did not have many friends that we kept from high school because we were going forward with our lives and most of them were still in party mode. We started hanging out with people I was teaching with and that group bonded, so some of our best friends are from that. We have not had a large circle of friends, but we have a few different couples, really good friends.

*On Jack pursuing a career in policing, and coping with the transition to the new career:*

A friend of ours, her boyfriend at the time just joined as a member, and he was talking about how much fun it was, and that he really enjoyed it. My husband’s father was with the police department, and had always said to Jack, ‘don’t be a police officer’. After talking to this friend, Jack thought, ‘that’s not a bad idea’. I did not know, but he had gone and applied. We got married and after a short honeymoon, I opened the mailbox and it was like, ‘the police department? What’s this? Why didn’t you tell me?’ He said, ‘well, I wasn’t sure.’ I guess he wanted to leave this option open, and he did it as a spur-of-the-moment thing and forgot about it, then was totally surprised when they said yes, come for an interview. I was not upset; it was more like, ‘you’re sure you want to do this?’ I think his father went through his career without ever having to draw his gun. The safety thing was certainly a concern, but it was not as big of an issue. Being in a union, I also am aware that every job has its dangers. Jack was fast-tracked through the program, and by December was hired and going for training in January. He had a military background so I think that had an impact. We did not have a lot of time to think about it, and it was just the excitement.

He had a lot of fun in the first parts of it. Once he got accepted, he went through training and they would all come over to our place and study, or pretend to study. I remember looking at
these guys; most of them were still kids, really young in their early twenties. We thought we were all grown up at the time. They grabbed these little fly-swatter guns, and they would be doing drills in our house, hiding around corners and shooting each other. There was a lot of laughter, and I do not think anybody was too concerned about safety or the emotional impact, or what would happen if there were serious issues to deal with.

Jack decided that he did not want to go to the same department where his dad worked for a while, and he put that off, but part of me did want him to be there. They played slow-pitch together, so they travelled and went to weekend tournaments. It is funny, because his dad said, do not do it, and now Jack is telling our daughter the same thing. It has changed; the issues in the 80’s were not the same as what people have to deal with now, but it is not limited to policing.

He is seeing how much the stress affects him and other people. Watching the news, you notice a lot of people do not have a high opinion of the police. I keep reminding him, there are lots that do, but when you are bombarded with media, it is difficult. His brother is a firefighter, and of course, they always get the good stories. So he says to Jack, ‘well, you could have been one too!’ It is a friendly war between the two of them. Jack says, ‘you get to sleep at night, I have to work!’

When Jack went through police training, he had a couple of really good friends from his recruiting class, and there were three couples that we used to have dinner parties with on a rotating basis, that was a lot of fun. When he went to [name of other police department], we had a different group of friends there. Jack had one friend from the police academy, and they stayed friends for a long time, but with different situations in the friend’s life and ours, they lost touch.

We had a good friend that went through the academy but he was killed in a crash. They just had their graduation, and we got together at New Year’s at one of the guy’s houses. A week
later, it was icy, [name of friend] was standing by the police car, and a car hit him. That would have been ’82, so that was the first one, and that was hard. Last year Jack was involved with the teen police academy. This friend’s nephew, who obviously had never met his uncle, was in the class. Jack thought that was really neat, and said, ‘I knew your uncle! We went to Seattle together and watched all of the soccer games!’

The department always does a Christmas party for the officers that have young families, and they used to have barbecues in the summertime, that went on for years. All of a sudden, they stopped doing them. I do not know if it was lack of interest or what happened, maybe the people organizing retired. Even the camaraderie is not the same as it used to be. They used to always have the Mess dinners, but this year they could not get enough people interested to come. We did look forward to connecting with people, even if only twice a year. When our daughter was younger, I did not want to do things with people from work. I spent eight hours with them already, and I wanted family time. Maybe the younger officers are feeling the same way, and it is probably the budget.

**On the perceived impact of Jack’s career on their marriage and family:**

Yeah, it has an impact, but I do not know if it is more positive or negative than any other profession. I was talking to my daughter about it the other day, and I said, ‘what was the best thing about dad being a police officer?’ She said, ‘NAMOA’, that is a motorcycle association. They call them conferences, but they are really competitions! [Laughs] We were fortunate enough that our daughter focused on her schoolwork, so we did not worry about pulling her from school for a couple of days to go and have an adventure. You spend the whole weekend watching motorcycle riding; it was really neat, sort of like Top Gun, but with motorcycles!

I asked her, ‘what was the worst thing?’ She said, ‘shiftwork’. I said, ‘yeah, but Dad got
to go to a lot of your field trips and all these other things that he wouldn’t have done if he had a Monday to Friday 9 to 5 job.’ She said, ‘yeah, but he wasn’t there to tell me bedtime stories’, that was their tradition. I would read the stories to her, and then she would con Dad into telling her a story, because he told the best ones. That was two nights a week she missed that, so it did have an impact, but of course, I reminded her that not all dads tell their kids stories, so she was lucky to have them five nights a week.

On the positive side, it is definitely a stable, secure job, you have a good pension, and good medical benefits, so that is definitely a pro. But then, you worry about their safety and you cannot help it, you hear sirens and you think, what is happening? It does not really upset you, but you note it, especially if they go on for a long period of time, and you just hope everybody is ok. The shiftwork, again, I cannot put it down. It allows opportunities for four days off every week. Sometimes I get three days off, so if our days coordinate, then I can just take an extra day and we can go camping. We do not like crowds, so it was nice to create our own long weekends.

Jack had opportunities with his work. The training and travelling was good family time, it was like a mini-holiday for us, and a lot of excitement, a lot of pride in that. He has met some good friends who he still stays in touch with, but some of them have moved away and retired. Jack picked up skills that he really enjoyed. If he had not been in traffic and had the opportunity to learn to ride a motorcycle, he would not have done it outside of work. In fact, I went and got my motorcycle license. When I turned 40, just after my parents passed away, I thought, ok, I have spent time looking after them; I need something for me for awhile! I took a safety course, and eventually got it. We rode for awhile, but then things got crazy on the road, and riding to work one day I had a couple of close calls, so I said to him, ‘this is going away for awhile.’ First and foremost, I am a mom, and I would never put her on the back of the motorcycle. It was nice
to ride to work, but if I had to take her to school first, we had to have the car. Maybe one day we will get back into riding.

From my point of view, I think there are more positives than negatives. Call-outs in the middle of the night were not a lot of fun, because you knew something bad had happened, and you worry how it is going and you still have to get up in the morning, go to work yourself and get kids off to school. Those were challenging but it did not happen every day. Sometimes he would go months without a call, and then all of a sudden, he would have three in one week. So then we have to do something to de-stress. He had to miss some family events, and sometimes the 12-hour shifts were difficult, particularly when our daughter was a baby. There was one day I remember in particular, Jack came home at 6 o'clock and I just said, ‘here!’ and handed him our daughter. I had not had a shower or a bite to eat, it was just one of those days. On the good days, which most of them were, it was not a problem, but if she was sick, or if I had extra stuff at work, then a 12-hour shift plus the travel time for him was a long day.

Occasionally, he was away for training. All of a sudden, you are a single parent, you are working full-time, and I have to work some night shifts, so trying to get daycare was challenging. Fortunately, most of the time for nightshifts I could take a vacation day, but I could not do it always, it was a lot of juggling. He used to do 8-hour shifts, and he was always home for dinner. He almost always got home before I did, so he did the cooking, and we had some really great meals. Now it is 10-hour shifts and he does not get home until close to 6 o’clock, and our arrangement has always been whoever is home first does the cooking.

One time we were out for the weekend, Jack got a call-out and replied, ‘I’m not coming. My daughter is racing, and you will have to find somebody else.’ In the early stages, he would not turn down a call-out, he would go. He is quite analytical, so he really enjoyed doing traffic
reconstruction. Eventually, the emotional aspect started creeping in, and it was not just scientific anymore, so that was negative, but it started off really positive. Jack has not been in traffic reconstruction for two years, ever since the [name of file 2] case.

Having to listen to the media and the disrespect has been difficult. I know Jack feels like it is a reflection on him. I said, ‘the police are getting a bad name right now, but it’s a very small percentage of them. When you think about it, politicians have a worse name, and there’s only a few that stand out as being really good!’ You have to try to re-focus, and sometimes you can do it, while other times you cannot. I try to get him to push aside the negative comments that are being made about police in general, and not take it personally, which is easier said than done. I say, ‘anybody who knows you knows that you do your job to the best of your ability, you have integrity, you’re honourable, and it doesn’t reflect on you.’ He goes, ‘yeah, but it’s everybody else!’ It is hard to re-focus and think that way, you have to be constantly encouraged to do it, but we work on it!

On describing how she feels when Jack discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:

I want to let him talk and try to be encouraging. If you talk about things long enough, usually you can let it go a little bit easier. Some of the things you can imagine, if it involves a child you think, oh, the poor family! When he is coming home upset, I feel bad for him, but at the same time, I want to remind him that he is doing something positive that is going to help those families by giving them closure or whatever. I do not know how I really feel, because I am more focused on how he is feeling, and want to deal with that.

Yes, some calls he can talk about, and some no. That is when I say, ‘you’re going to call [name of counselling psychologist] now.’ Then it is about following through on that, because it is easy to just say to him, ‘you need to call’. It is like, ‘ok, have you made an appointment?'
When are you going?’ Then calling him a couple of hours beforehand saying, ‘are you getting ready? You are going?’ It is easy for him to say, ‘well, I’ll just shake it off’, it is like, ‘no, you don’t need to shake it off, you need to deal with it.’

There is still that feeling out there that they are tough, and not supposed to let things get to them. When he got the post-traumatic stress, his parents were going to Mexico for a month. We did not say anything to them because we did not want to put a damper on their holidays, but when they came back, we told them. His mother’s first response was, ‘oh, there’s nothing wrong with you. You just need a month in Mexico.’ I just looked at her, and I probably should not have said it, but I said, ‘no, he doesn’t need a month in Mexico, he needs to talk to his counsellor, and he needs to do what his counsellor suggests.’ That is the only thing they have ever said about it, because it makes them feel uncomfortable. Anything emotional is not like something physical. You can deal with something physical, and it is like, ‘oh you poor thing, you’ve got a broken leg’, and you get sent the same encouragement. When it is something you cannot see and it makes the other people feel uncomfortable, they do not want to deal with it. I think even the members themselves are that way.

Apparently now, [name of police department] is insisting that after each collision and investigation, the officers have to go see somebody, which is a really good thing. Whether they talk about it or it actually bothers them. A lot of the cases Jack had – it sounds harsh – but if it was stupidity involved and they only injured themselves, it was like, what did you expect? He would say, ‘well, they shouldn’t have done that!’ It is good that they can make it cut and dry that way, but when it involved an innocent victim, somebody just minding their own business or a child, that is when it bothered him.

He did the [name of file 1] file, where the boys were killed in the car with their friend.
That one was really tough, especially because they were a similar age to our daughter. He might discuss things with me, and I have to be careful if it has not been released to the public yet. When people at work are talking about this in-the-news case, you have to excuse yourself and leave to make sure you do not say something. Sometimes I would ask him, ‘did they release this information yet? Because somebody just told me that, and I thought you said it hadn’t been released.’ He would say, ‘oh, the news came out an hour ago.’ I would not say it is stressful, but something I have to be aware of. I would not want him not talking to me, so to let it out a bit.

Describing her observations of Jack’s coping strategies for operational stress:

About the time the stress started bothering him, Jack became diabetic, so he cannot go on general duties now. We figure it is stress-induced, and partly, it is his way of dealing with stuff. Jack gets through everything by cooking and eating, which would be good, but he has to learn to control the amount of food, and he likes sauces, so we have all gained weight because of it. He had issues with his foot, so could not go for long walks, which we used to be able to do. When he was off on post-traumatic stress leave, a friend of ours had afternoons off so the two of them would meet up and go swimming every afternoon. It was a win-win situation for both of them; they both got into better shape and they were able to talk briefly and help each other deal with different things. When Jack went back to work, he was not able to keep up with his swimming, so all that weight that he had lost came back on.

He loves to putter in the garden, he did Tai Chi for awhile, and he took a carving class, which was really neat and something he wanted to follow up on. He likes to read and he veks sometimes, which is good, but it is about trying to get him up and doing more. For awhile, he was writing down his feelings and thoughts. That was good, and I tried to encourage that. He got out of the habit of it, but did find it helpful and I would like to see him do it again.
Once they realized what was going on and that the traffic was really bothering him, he took a total of about six months off and knew he could not go back into traffic. He thought maybe he could if he did not do the collision investigation, but just being in the atmosphere would trigger things. So, he was off for another couple of months. When he went back, he worked for almost a year doing school liaison, then a position opened up in the community station, and he went there. He enjoys it, he is retiring next year and winding down. For the most part, he has good days. It is like, ‘you’re retiring in March, you have six months of holidays left and we have bills to pay, just deal with it.’ Sometimes I am not as sympathetic as I could be, but I figure that he just needs a little push. It is a further drive, longer hours, and some days he would just as soon not go to work.

Jack does not want to completely retire, but he is ready to get out of policing. He sees it more as a negative thing than a positive thing now. The times have changed, and the politics within the department have changed. In some ways, it is the cliquiness. I would not call them old-boys clubs, but there are groups that hang around, and if you are not doing the things that they are doing, or do not have the same perception, then you are excluded. I realize that you cannot have everybody in any workplace all on the same page, but sometimes it is harder to deal with because they are a small force. They have to watch each other’s back, particularly the people in patrol, and it does help to have the camaraderie. I am not saying he did not have it, but he was not interested in partying on the weekends, so it makes a difference. Jack still keeps in touch with some of the guys that have retired, and we get together as a group quite often, there are about twenty people. The guys go off in a corner, and say, ‘did you hear about this?’ It is a good way for them to de-stress and put things into perspective again.

I am not in that frame of mind of retiring; I enjoy what I am doing and the everyday
aspect of it is a lot of fun. Things are changing though. About two weeks ago, there was an incident outside the building where police cars pulled up and the officers all had their guns drawn. Having Jack in policing, I knew we had to lock the doors, so we did a quick lock down.

Up until the [name of file 2] case, Jack had some files that were troubling. He had nightmares or would be upset, but he dealt with them fairly quickly and mostly on his own. The [name of file 1] case with the four teens killed, that bothered him, but he was able to get past it. With the [name of file 2] case, he could not, he had troubles finishing the file [pause; teary], troubles sleeping, he was definitely grumpy, depressed, and one day at work they realized something was wrong and sent him to [the counselling psychologist], which was wonderful.

In some ways, I felt like, ‘I dropped the ball’. I was thinking, there is something wrong, he should go talk to somebody. But in policing, they had not talked to him about doing that. Once he started seeing [the counselling psychologist], it was almost a relief to put a label on it, and it was like, ok, there are certain things we can do, and it broke it down into little steps. I think he had gone to a counselor once before, but not on a regular basis. Sometimes he talked to the chaplain, but it was more in passing, not in an appointment.

In the [name of file 2] case, it was different [pause; teary]. She looked very much like our niece, who had leukemia, and every time you saw the picture of her and knew what had happened, it was more personal. It should not have been, but it was, I cannot explain why. Thankfully, never having been in that position, you do not know how you would react as a parent yourself. We tend to keep more to ourselves, but in that case, the parent put everything into the media very quickly, and you could not escape it! You felt horrible for them, but at the same time, it was like, please take her picture off the TV! He was trying to deal with it and we were trying to deal with it, and every time you turned it on, it was always there.
I do not know exactly how it went [to get a referral for counselling]. I think somebody suggested he had better go. He was on a deadline trying to get a file done. He was sitting in front of the computer, and he broke down and said, ‘I cannot do this!’ Somebody said, ‘you are going to see [the counselling psychologist] this afternoon’, and within an hour, he was there, it was that quick. He went back to work for a day or two, knowing he was going to take a leave, and he was off the first time for about four months. He went back for a little while, and listening to the stories of other people going to the crash scenes, he said, ‘no, I cannot handle it.’

 Sadly, I think if he had dealt with it all, if they had counselling after each collision, maybe he would have been able to stay in traffic. There were aspects of it that he really did enjoy, and he was good at it. He really has an analytical mind, and he was able to take all that data and find out exactly what happened. He was classified as an expert witness after the [name of file 1] case and he got a couple of different awards for his work with it. He was really proud of that. That case, it bothered him, but it was a controlled bother. If it did not bother him, I would have been more worried. It would have been like him having no emotions, no feelings, and you do not want that either. Being upset a little bit about it was okay, from my point of view, and I think from his too. But with the [name of file 2] case, he had no control over that, it was not just being a little upset, he was losing control. He has got that back now, but if it comes on TV, he will change the channel. Jack is looking forward to being retired and going swimming everyday and that type of thing, which is good for the stress. He spent all day yesterday in the garden while I was working, and you notice afterwards when he has done something like that, he is more relaxed.

 Jack was really lucky. I guess it was around Christmas time; somebody at work called him in and said, ‘could you talk to this fellow?’ He was a firefighter who had seen a lot
obviously, who had post-traumatic stress. It cost him his marriage, his family, and friendships. He was basically out on the street, drinking, and not functioning. They had him in the jail cell to detox, and asked Jack to go talk to him. Jack did, and said, ‘I know where you’re coming from, I know what you’re going through, but drinking is not the way to do it.’ He gave him some suggestions and from what I heard, he took some of it to heart and is trying to get some help. It was really good that Jack was able to help somebody else from his own experience.

I was going to say Jack never smoked, but he did in the academy for a little while. Often the guys would go for a beer and a cigarette, so he would have a cigarette. That lasted for two weeks, because we dated for five years, and all of a sudden, he is smoking! I said, ‘I’m sorry, not happening! You’re not going to kiss me if you’ve been smoking.’ So he quit. I cannot say I have ever been too concerned about the drinking. Calorie-wise, he certainly should cut back, but they say that red wine is good for you, and he does not drink by himself, it is mostly social. I made a point of watching that because that was one thing somebody said could be a concern.

*On coping individually with stress, and information shared by Jack about the job:*

I like scrapbooking and painting, and finding projects to not block out what has happened, but to keep busy and keep looking forward. You could always do it better; you always think you should have done this and not that. I always think I should have caught the post-traumatic stress earlier, but it is what it is.

*On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:*

Jack would start shaking when he saw the pictures on TV. He is the type that likes to read the newspaper cover to cover, every story, but I started noticing that certain pages he would turn quickly. I would check afterwards, and it was the [name of file 2] story, it was front and centre for such a long time. He was not sleeping at night; he would wake up shaking or upset.
When he started seeing [the counselling psychologist] that really helped in the sense that a lot of the attitude at work is suck-it-up type of thing. When he was able to tell [the counselling psychologist] it was like, it is okay, it does happen and it has happened for years. Finally, that acceptance of it was really good, then finding ways to deal with it - physically, swimming; emotionally, talking about it, writing things down, going regularly at first to see [the counselling psychologist], then he started just going once a week. Jack even said that sometimes he did not talk about the case per say, but instead the strategies to deal with it, or how about that football game, just having somebody to talk to and listen. Last summer, we turned off the TV because if he was not thinking about it, he was able to deal with it. Every so often, he would phone me and say, ‘I do not want to hear what is going on, but have they made a decision?’ In the morning, I gathered up the paper before Jack did, and I said, ‘okay, you can have these pages!’ Trying to filter that information carefully to give him enough answers so he could keep going, but not too much that he would dwell on it. It was like censoring for awhile, but we got through it.

Jack did not have to testify in court, [the counselling psychologist] said that would not be a good thing for him to do. They brought in an expert witness to interpret his notes, and the papers made a big issue about that, about if he is working, why is he not well enough to testify? They do not realize that with post-traumatic stress, he would not have been able to testify on the stand; he would have broken down completely. Again, it is the physical versus emotional – if he could not go to court because he had a broken leg, they would think nothing of it. For the most part, our friends were really supportive and understanding, they got it. Sadly, some family members did not.

When Jack was stressed, I was trying to stay one step ahead of him. I would not say it caused stress, but it caused extra work, because I was trying still to balance home stuff, and help
him by keeping him re-focused. I think a lot of the times, he knew what I was doing and he appreciated it, but there were other times where I am sure he did not have a clue, because he was just trying to get through things. So trying to stay a step ahead, but you do that for a lot of things, you do it with your own children, and with the dogs. He would do the same thing for me.

I do not know if I am reacting to be protective of Jack, or if it is completely logical. Sometimes I feel like, why is one person being focused on so much? I mean, obviously, logically, it is more upsetting when it is a young child. But the loss for all those other families is just as great. It is hard to deal with some days. You are trying not to be unsympathetic or judgmental, and you are just so grateful you are not in that position, but I sometimes wonder if they realize – the other people that responded that day, how are they feeling? I wish the family well, and anything that can get drunk drivers off the road is a good thing, but it does make the day-to-day stuff challenging sometimes.

One way we have always dealt with things is projects. We usually watch TV, and it got to the point where we could not put the TV on. So we said, ‘ok, we need a project!’ Finding projects to keep his mind off what was going on was really helpful, and the whole family got involved. We put the floor in last year, to keep Jack busy so he was not dwelling on negative thoughts, and now we have something positive that is going to make everyone happier. At the same time, my daughter’s friend from high school moved in with us for almost year, so it was good, it started a whole new project, because our storage room became her bedroom!

Busy is good! That is how we deal with a lot of things, by finding something fun that we are going to enjoy doing. When my niece was in the hospital, she was very young at the time, this is Jack’s sister’s daughter. She looks very much like the young [name of file 2] girl. Somehow it came up that she wanted to have a party, so I told her we would have one. My mom
was still alive at the time, but she was terminal, so it was like, ok, what are we going to do to have fun? We ended up turning our whole basement into a castle. That took us almost 6 months to do, and of course, you have done all this work, you might as well have a few more parties! So we did, we had friends over. It was something to keep busy physically, spend time with family, and try to keep a balance.

Lately, now that our daughter is older, we have started getting theatre tickets. We have shows that we are going to see, so always having something fun to look forward to helps to get through those more serious, difficult times. It is something you are aware of and sense. If you know a trial is coming up, you know automatically that things are going to be stressed. We are fortunate, most of the time, we sit down and have dinner together, and talk about our day. You can tell through the discussion that something happened at work, or somebody said something that was upsetting or troubling, so you start planning something, and it works for us. We always seem to have something going on, and we would rather have a few short trips a year, rather than a big one and waiting the rest of the year without.

One worry that came to mind is because he was in traffic; I think we are probably more cautious with our daughter. She drives out to see her boyfriend, and comes home late so we have this thing where she texts us when she is leaving and we know when she gets home. I think we are more aware of the types of incidents that can happen on the road, and maybe we worry more than other families.

We were lucky. Often when you meet young, you grow in different directions. We have always been able to play off each other to keep a balance. If Jack is going through a tough time, I try to be more encouraging, and vice-versa, but sometimes it does not work. We are not the type that scream and throw things at each other. We do not fight that much. We have
differences of opinions, but it is more like, ‘I disagree with you’, it is not, ‘you’re an idiot!’ If one of us is really stressed and we are not in sync, then my way is to go for a drive and cool off, and an hour later, everything is fine, let’s go for coffee. He will go to the driving range and smack some golf balls or call up a friend and go swimming. I think we have recognized when we are starting to lose control a little bit, and know what to do to counter it. When I was going through stuff with my parents, he was always there. I do not think it has changed over the years; we have always done it that way.

Overeating is definitely an issue, but we are working on that one. Now we can start going for walks. We used to go to the park every Saturday morning for a walk. We did that for years, and we were able to pick up my mom and take her with us. It was not a long walk, it did not involve a long time commitment, but it was something we enjoyed.

We have wine, and friends stop by regularly. People tell stories, and it is always something to look forward to. Nobody over-drinks or drinks and drives, but could probably cut back occasionally. I grew up living in South America so things like wine are part of the culture.

On being together as a couple for 35 years:

You know what each other is thinking and what direction they are heading. We are not at the point of finishing each other’s sentences, but you know a certain look. Sometimes, things you think would bother him do not, and vice-versa. Watching certain movies, he will become very emotional thinking about something that is triggered, and others where there is violence, it does not bother him at all. It is nice to have somebody that lets you be who you are, supports that and encourages it, but at the same time, values your togetherness. You enjoy your time apart, but it makes you enjoy your time together more.

Our friends are all people who have been together for a long time. In the police
department, the divorce rate is horrendous, and the multiple divorce rate. We are attracted to people who have that commitment and similar values that we have. We are close enough that we phone each other up if there is an issue. The friends nearby, their parents live with them, and when they go away, we have the parents over for dinner, because they kind of adopted us, they have become our daughter’s second grandparents, they absolutely adore her. It is nice to know you can count on people, and they are not just fair-weather friends. Our daughters used to rock-climb together, so we joined families and got a discount, it has been quite fun!

At my work, when there is an issue, it is like, ‘go talk to Joan, she’ll turn it into lemonade!’ I could not figure out what they meant at first. I think we do that without really thinking. We try to take something negative, and find something positive in it, even if just a little bit. Nothing is one hundred percent negative, you learn from it. When our daughter was little, we had her in the hospital a lot, because she thought she could fly. We embraced the whole philosophy of re-labeling, so instead of saying something like, ‘she was stubborn’, it is ‘she was determined’, because determined sounds way more positive than stubborn. Something that might be negative is ‘interesting’, not to take away from the negative or sad aspect of something, but just so that we do not dwell on the negative. It really changed our outlook.

*Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:*

I am not sure I am in a position to give advice; I think people have to find what works for them. What works for one person does not work for another. Because I work in [name of community], there is the Redbook, and I know there are resources out there. We have an employee assistance program, and I know Jack does too.

When my mom passed away, the hospital kept phoning, saying, ‘come to our grief support group’. I did not want to, it meant time away from my family, and working full-time,
family time with Jack and our daughter was really important to me, and that got me through it. Spending time talking to Jack and my brother about it also got me through it. I appreciate where the person was coming from, and for a lot of people, going to a support group would have been more beneficial than being with their families to deal with it, but they did not want to take no for an answer, which was interesting. I said, ‘that is going to be my decision if I need it, or if my husband says to me, ‘I think you need it’.’ Just knowing different types of options would be beneficial, or suggestions of try this or try that. It is like parenting, where discipline does not work the same for every child. There is no one answer for every couple or every situation.

Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for the police organization about operational stress:

Sometimes people need a push. I do not think there was ever that push, or any follow-up. When Jack was off on post-traumatic stress leave, his personal friends at work would call and say, ‘hey, how are you doing?’ But nobody officially called him to say, ‘how are you doing? Is there anything we can do to help?’ Had he been home with cancer, you know, they do work parties; they do all these other things. There was nothing physically wrong with him to stop him from doing stuff, but that emotional support was not there. It is tricky to balance, because some people will see it as interference, and they may be embarrassed or uncomfortable, and not want to talk to their supervisors. At the same time, I think a little bit of input or touching base would have been helpful to say, ‘we get it, how are you doing? Are you okay?’ In a lot of cases, I do not think they get it completely; there is a lot of that old mentality of suck it up and deal with it, you are a guy, do not cry. With younger members less so, it is more the older members because that is what they were brought up with too. Jack has not really had that issue – he will cry in a sad movie, and he does not feel he is less of a person because of it. I like the fact that he can show his emotions freely, but at work, it is different, like, you are a police officer, you should not
be emotional. I do not think you can do your job properly if you cannot connect.

Act on it sooner than later, and maybe they are starting to do that. I do not know if they do it for the Emergency Response teams - I have a feeling that they do have a debriefing after each incident that they are called out. Getting the departments more involved would be good, but maybe in a removed way, where counsellors are outside of the workplace so that there is privacy. It is really difficult to change an attitude that has been ingrained for so long. It would be good to make everybody feel inclusive, and not like outcasts because something happened. I think they need to do that with anybody, whether it is in patrol or elsewhere. Maybe not completely formally, but a combination of informal at the very moment afterwards, as soon as it is possible to have a debriefing, and then follow up within a week with somebody trained to talk to them, just to make sure – is everything going okay, and to remind them, ‘hey, come see us if you want to, if you are finding a change in eating patterns or sleeping, or drinking or not socializing or enjoying things that you used to enjoy.’ Sometimes, I think they need that invitation, and if they have already made contact with them, I think it would be easier.

I need to feel confident that the department is taking care of the needs, because you can do stuff at home, which you do anyways, but to know that it is backed up at work. With Jack, at home I think he was in control of his emotions and feelings. He was definitely more restless and grumpy, but it was not out of control, and it was understandable with what he was dealing with. Like, he will be this way for a week or two or a month, but I know he is going to get through it. I was not seeing what was happening at work. They could have acted on it sooner [teary], if they were looking for it. It is so easy, understandably, to just think, ‘he or she will be fine later’. If they could keep a closer eye on it and try to intervene sooner, it is quite possible that it would not escalate to the levels it does. You hear about post-traumatic stress and how people have gone
completely off the deep end and lost everything – Jack was never to that level, partly because we worked on it together, and partly because of his personality, he would not let it go that far. With others, we have seen what has happened. I think support at the beginning stages really pays off. The person in Jack’s previous position is a young fellow with a young family. I do not know if that makes him more resilient to what is happening, or if it can make it more difficult, I guess it depends on the person. Jack has talked to him and said, ‘make sure you go for debriefings after, and talk regularly to somebody.’ Jack knows his wife, and she is pretty on top of things.

Again, through my work, being in the union with health and safety and labour management, we do critical stress stuff; it is quite a big issue. Jack is the first to say that he has a week go by with nothing major to deal with back in patrol. I feel like some days, in my profession, we are seeing a lot of the stuff that the police have traditionally dealt with, and they do not give us guns! We want those tools too, not the guns, but the ability to deal with it, options to try to calm a situation down. It does help, and I would not have had that experience had Jack not been in policing, it is not something that they train you on at university. We have relied on the police for so long, but they cannot be everywhere at once.

Jack was really happy to see that they built Honour House. I said to him, ‘maybe not now but in the future, you can think about volunteering there’, since sharing does heal, it is good for everybody. He said, ‘yeah, maybe…’ Once he feels confident that he has got everything under control, and he is doing pretty well, maybe later.

The other night, we were watching TV, and all of a sudden, the [name of file 2] case came on again. As soon as I heard that name, I came in and asked, ‘is everything ok?’ And he said, ‘yeah…’. A year ago, he would have had to turn off the TV or change channels, and he is now able to watch that. You can see the progress being positive, and we know there are going to
be times where he will slip back, but still, it was good. He can control it most of time, as far as I know. Sometimes, even though you know logically it has happened to other people and it is not uncommon, you still feel like you are the only person it is happening to. There is no easy answer, but if people are trained to recognize it, maybe they can feel things out and find out what each person does need. It is a big project!

*Explaining how it was for her to do the first interview:*

Some things that were in the back of my mind, I do not really dwell on them too much, but sometimes, dwelling is a good thing. Jack only has a couple of weeks left, then he goes on holidays for the rest of the year, and then gets his holidays for next year, so he is off for four months on vacation, and then he is retired from policing. I am making my list of things that he can do. He does not want to totally retire, and I have a few more years. I have noticed in the last couple of weeks that he is more relaxed, and he is really looking forward to it.

It will be interesting to read what other families say about how they deal with and interpret things. Jack is interested in it too, anything that can remove the stress for the younger families coming in. We definitely need people doing those jobs, but we need to support them.

*On her hopes and dreams for the future with Jack, and their family:*

One step at a time [teary; pause] - the stress from all the cases resulted in Jack becoming diabetic, and having high blood pressure. My father passed away from diabetes [teary], very young. The first goal is to get Jack healthy. It is all a balance, before, I did not want to push it too much, because I thought the mental and emotional part of it was more important, and now, it is the physical. He is taking it a little more seriously, and he is at that right stage where he is ready to address it. We all think that we are invincible, and certainly he does too. That is probably part of being a police officer. We have to take responsibility and steps to make sure
that we have long, happy lives, so just taking it a day at a time, that is the main thing [teary].

We do not make any great big plans; it is like, ‘we can get a great deal on airfare to Haida Gwaii. Let’s go up there for five days!’ Next spring, apparently, we are doing a lamb roast for the neighbourhood. So it is the little things that we are talking about. We do not have big plans yet, unless the opportunity presented itself. The big priority for the future is that we want a future! I am really hoping that it all falls into place.

Ideally, I think our daughter wants to stay in the Lower Mainland. So, wherever she is, we will be fairly close, because we enjoy spending time with her. She is still young, and things could change, and so we do not put down any roots that cannot be pulled up if we had to move. In an ideal world, I would like to stay here, and have our daughter close enough that we can go see her and she can come home to visit, but whatever is going to be, we will deal with it! We will go with the flow and enjoy it as much as we can.
Pauline’s story

Background

Pauline and Ryan have been together for 20 years, and married for 17. Pauline is 42 years of age, and Ryan is 41. It is the first marriage for both of them, and they have one child. They got married prior to Ryan becoming a police officer with a municipal department. Ryan has worked as a police member for 10 years; he is a detective and currently holds the position of Acting Sergeant. Pauline is completing her Master of Arts.

On establishing themselves as a couple (meeting, getting married, having kids, etc.):

We met on the first day of basic training in the military, when we were both about 21. I have a military background, so it does give a different perspective. We were friends, and within a month or two, started dating, and dated for two years. We got engaged when we were 23 or 24, and got married a year later. I guess I would categorize that first stage as sort of “dating”. I would categorize the next seven years as our period of young marriage, young adulthood, where we were still really immature. Our friends were not married or even in significant relationships, and we still partied a lot, went clubbing, did all those things, but we were married.

We bought our first place a few years later. It was close to the pubs and bars, and everybody would converge at our house, and we would have these big parties. There were lots of great things about when we were young, but we got kind of trapped in that as opposed to saying, ‘hey, we’re maturing’, so there was a duality in our relationship at that time. It was natural! Why would we change our friends, right? It was not like we got married, and said, ‘ok, we can only hang out with married people’, we just hung out with people we knew from before. Now everybody has caught up, so it works again. We do not see all the same people, but there is still very much a core that we connect with, our friends from 15 or 20 years ago that have stayed
with us. We live very fully. We have a very vivacious crowd of people that we know. A lot of
them are from the military, but some do not have that affiliation, and many of them retired. I
retired two years ago. We do not talk about it anymore, but I think it is just that your
personalities are such that you just connect with them, and it is easy to get each other. Most of
our friends are big Type A personalities, so really charismatic, funny, and musical people. The
people we are drawn to are always the ones wearing uniforms, not the wallflower types.

We had a period of intense friction, before Ryan’s training in police, during it, and
subsequently; we almost divorced actually. It was a major time of stress for us. We were not
communicating, and we were these emerging adults, where it was like, are we growing in
parallel, are we growing in tandem, are we even growing? We were saying we did not want to
have kids and be parents. I think I was 32 or 33, and realized, ‘I do not want to be a parent with
you.’ Both of us started emotionally finding and prioritizing other people and things in our lives.
We were more focused on our respective careers. I started doing an MBA at the same time that
Ryan started his police training. When we looked at each other, I do not even think we were in
each other’s top five; there was a whole bunch of other things that were.

It exploded when we were up in Whistler one weekend. It was the old, ‘I don’t know if I
love you’. At that point, I knew I loved him, but I did not know if it was the kind of love that
would sustain us over the next 30 or 40 years. Ryan definitely went into crisis. I remember I
drove him to his doctor so he could get some sleeping pills, because he had to do shiftwork, and
he could not function, so that was the first time he had ever used sleeping pills.

There was lots of family stuff for both of us too. Ryan’s parents actively encouraged
him to break off his relationship with me, and did for many years; they were not even remotely
supportive of him being with me, so it was not like we were welcomed into this cocoon of
support. Then we just made a decision, like, are we going to be a couple, will we continue on, or will we separate? Ryan moved out, and we had a temporary separation just to see what it was like to not live together. That night, he had just moved over to his parents, and he was calling me at about six o’clock, and it was going to be the first night that he had not slept at home. Call waiting came through and I took the call from my mom that my dad had had a heart attack, so I went back to Ryan and I told him. He drove over, and he never left the house. To this day, I attribute the longevity of our relationship to the fact that my dad almost died.

We connected with a counsellor through Ryan’s employee assistance program [EAP], who was a former RCMP constable, and incredibly helpful for us at that time. We worked with a counsellor for two years, and we reconciled. I would say the last eight years is the more mature phase of our marriage - just before we got pregnant, then pregnancy and afterwards.

We were getting on the same page probably in May of 2003, and that June or July we took a trip to Bermuda to stay with a friend of ours who was living there. It was the first time that we actually had fun. There is something to be said about going on a holiday, getting out of your environment and just focusing on your partner. We came back and by August or so, we said, ‘we think we are open to this’. I was working full time for the Canadian Forces [CF] at the time. It was a big job, and they had this fantastic benefit where if you got pregnant, you got a year’s worth of maternity benefits at one hundred percent of your salary. The way it worked, I had to get pregnant by Christmas. We said, ‘let’s try, and if by Christmas I’m not pregnant, we just won’t have a baby.’ Of course, two months later we were pregnant, and our son was the result.

I finished the MBA, and my payment for that lovely benefit being topped up was that I owed the military a year of service, so I had to work full-time for another year, and then I started
exploring. I was trying to find something that would bridge my interest in people. All I had ever dealt with was people; I worked with PTSD in the military and supervised people that had PTSD. I just did not have the tools to be that empathetic support, but that was not my role either.

On Ryan pursuing a career in policing, and coping with the transition to the new career:

Ryan always wanted to be a police officer. His uncle was a cop with [name of municipal department], and was the chief at [name of other municipal department], and he is quite close with him in regards to that. Ryan’s maternal grandfather was a police officer, served in the war, and then went and worked in Veterans Affairs, so there is a lot of history around that. I actually applied to be a cop years ago. I was 21, and went through the interviewing process, and it was horrible. The woman did not even say hello, and the first thing she asked me was whether my parents were alcoholics. Since they are, I had to say, ‘yes, they are alcoholics’, and then it just went to shit from there. It was a really bad experience. In retrospect, I am very thankful for the experience. It was not meant to be my chosen profession, and I did not pursue it after that.

When Ryan and I met, we were doing volunteer training. We were reserve officers in the military, considering making it a full-time career, and living over in Victoria, training to be Navigators. His first love was he wanted to join the RCMP. In the early 90’s, they were hiring everybody except white males. So there was no way, with the reverse discrimination, because they had a point system then, it was horrific. It did not matter what your educational background was, or your qualifications, or anything. If you were a white male, you were so disadvantaged, there were no white males getting in. He was told at that time to forget it!

Ryan’s father was a municipal employee, so Ryan decided, since he could not go into policing, he needed some other type of career. He worked for the city for a number of years until he finally reapplied to become a police officer. I always knew from the get-go that there were
going to be uniforms in our closet, we have a lot of them in our house! [Laughs] There was never any surprise. Now our son wears a uniform when he goes to school, and he is in Beavers now, so they wear a uniform there too! We laugh about that.

I was thrilled for Ryan actually when he did make the decision that he was not satisfied with his career in the city. He decided to apply for the police department, and I supported him. Even though it was not the RCMP, we saw advantages and disadvantages. At that point, we knew what it was like to work for a federal institution; there are some major ups and downs to it. Serving federally, they cannot post you, but your career is limited if you do not open yourself up to postings, and they do not do big-city policing. Their big-city policing is based in the Lower Mainland, so they are not the force that they used to be. My dad used to be in the RCMP and CSIS. He had a fairly prominent career, so I knew what it was like. We lived overseas, then in Ottawa, and moved to BC when I was 10. My dad retired when I was 17.

Ryan’s expertise right now is working in investigations. Our worlds actually cross more than they have since we were originally starting out in our careers. Within the confines of confidentiality, I talk to him about things like clients who are dealing with issues where they may touch on child protection stuff, or criminal things, and he is helpful.

*On the perceived impact of Ryan’s career on their marriage and family:*

No, it does not have an impact. Well, I should not say that. Yes, but generally speaking, it is a positive impact. He has a stable career, so he has job security in a time where there is not a lot. I was laid off last year. He is not going to get laid off, although they do a hiring freeze, which is their version of a lay-off. Particularly in his role now, he has autonomy and flexibility with regards to his hours. He can pursue professional development, which I think is a positive, because he does not like to do the same thing all the time. He has outlets and can implement
ideas. It is not the same job; it has a transformative quality. If people tire of one role, they can reinvent themselves, and develop other interests and expertise, so I cannot perceive of any negatives.

When my son was first born, Ryan was still doing shiftwork, and I hated that. I did not love it when we were single, because half the time you are this sort of plus one, and you can never make plans. I did not like it when our son was young and Ryan was unavailable. He would get home from work and we were getting up, and I would have to try and keep the house quiet, get our son bundled up and have to spend the whole day outside, it was not practical. It is hard for young families; I would not wish that on anybody.

He became a detective when our son was six months old. So he went into sex crimes at that point, and it was better shifts. He worked days and had some great partners, I really liked the people he worked with, they were terrific, and they had nice Christmas parties. Then he had an opportunity to join the integrated homicide unit, which is based out of Surrey, and they deal with unsolved murders; this is the only thing I have ever said no to. I totally did not want him to do that, because logistically, our son was super young, and Ryan would have worked all the time; he would have been away, and commuting a couple of hours a day, and we were not going to move. I was working, and I said, ‘I don’t know how we’re going to do this unless we have a nanny’, but I did not want to have somebody else raise our kid, and I could not see how it could work. Now, he goes through spurts with his schedule. It seems like every year, there is a two to three-month period where there is quite a bit of overtime needed of him. But then, he will go for months and it will be zero, and he will be the first one to pick our son up from school.

I think Ryan is proud of what he does. If he were to go back and do it all again, he would have done something probably that is more financially rewarding. I think he talked about going
back to school for awhile. He has other interests that maybe he would have pursued in hindsight, but this has been a good career for when he chose it, and what options were available.

For the job that he is currently doing, he needed to go away for training for three months, so that was a bit of a hardship, because it was a long stretch. We went out to visit him once halfway through, for about three days, and that was it. My employer was not particularly sympathetic, so I just had to be on all the time. But I was not afraid to ask for help, so I got Ryan’s mom for babysitting, and I got babysitters, and my stepdad came out one weekend, and my mom came out another weekend. So I made sure that I tried to do as much for me as I could.

With training, it is usually a week-long course that he does during the day. In comparison, with the military training we did, we were on ships and did not see each other. It is like I am acclimatized to it. I am a very well adjusted police wife.

When he was in training, when we were still in the throes of our distress, I remember him practicing handcuffing me, or drawing his weapon, I would have to spontaneously get him, so it was funny. I remember watching, as he was the top cadet from his course, and being very proud of him when he graduated. We all joked because we knew he would be the top recruit of course. We watched their graduation video and there is this slow-motion thing of them all getting tasered, it was funny. So lots of laughs, that part of it, it is always reminiscent. So I get him, because of my own culture in the military. There is so much familiarity there, so many cops were in the military, and lots of them still serve as reserves.

We are not saturated in cop friends. We have had a few parties where it is more military people than cops. But we had one of Ryan’s former partners over, with his wife and their daughter. I genuinely like his wife, and we have a relationship. Then, we had another one of his former bosses over who is just a big character, but it is not cop-land.
Ryan is incredibly attuned to emotional health, particularly around our son, and he is a more active parent than I am, he is very hands-on. All the daddy cops are so tuned into their kids. They are such wonderful fathers! They are so present, empathetic, and in the moment, I wonder, ‘what the fuck is that all about?’ But it is great and I see it again and again, I do not think I have seen an instance where that has not been the case, there is definitely something there. I am also realizing - certainly in the military, but policing too – there are tons of first-borns or only children that are officers. It is kind of like a ‘let me lead the way’ thing.

On describing how she feels when Ryan discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:

It is no problem. Ryan was in court this week on the witness stand for three days. He found it stressful, and it is unusual for him to be legitimately stressed with work. I looked at him, and he had this band of sweat running across his chest, and I said, ‘god, you are seriously stressed out!’ Over the past couple of nights, he has been waking up at three or four in the morning, and that is the last things he needs, an hour or two less of sleep.

Ryan and I both compartmentalize really well for the most part. Every once in awhile we get to a point where our schedules are crazy, our son is having stress at school, and there is family stuff going on. There is also a lot of death – Ryan’s grandparents are dying, and his dad has Parkinson’s. We find that when there are layers of stuff, then maybe work issues take on more prominence. But in general, if Ryan talks to me about work, it is either bouncing things off of me, or relating something funny that might have happened.

Describing her observations of Ryan’s coping strategies for operational stress:

It is not like he has imparted a coping strategy that now I incorporate, or his coping strategy negatively impacts me. We are both moderate drinkers, he does not smoke, so there are no habits like that. He was more visibly stressed his first few shifts, just in terms of performance
with his peers and things like that.

Ryan is a pretty funny guy. In the culture that I know in the military, and now the police - you tend to diffuse stress by laughing your asses off about the dumb-ass things that the bad guys do. Their role is to do the best job that they can in an imperfect situation. So maybe [descriptions of incidents] are scary, but the way he talks about it, it is a way for him to process and normalize it.

Ryan does exercise. He did not used to as much, and now he is getting better, so I think he uses that. He focuses on things that he considers priorities, like putting attention into our son, so he finds the quality of that diversion or emphasis, and then he reprioritizes on those things.

He has some work friends that he gets a chance to share with, and I would say not too lavishly, but they sort of emote in the male cop way that is appropriate, so he can do that. A lot of them work together, so he gets together with a couple of guys. The other thing is, male cops are like old Italian women gossiping. They talk smack all the time about each other, and they will text each other and sometimes I will hear them calling each other. Again, I just find that funny, that is what they need to do. It is probably because of being part of such a distinct sub-culture, and is anyone else going to get it? So it ends up being directed internally.

They have an annual psychological check-in, and it is mandatory for people in what they consider to be high-stress environments. Ryan uses that service, he has developed a relationship with the fellow, sees him at least annually, and I think he can see him a little bit more. Ryan sees the value of proactive mental health, and sees it as a positive benefit that is offered to police personnel so he is happy to take advantage of it. I would not be concerned if he got to a place where he really was struggling with something; he would tap into resources. He used the EAP when we were having our marital issues, so I suspect that he is comfortable with that.
It is all in how you process it. I think Ryan had a major advantage coming in to this job as a more mature adult, he had some life experience; he had dealt with some stressors. I see it all the time, he can deal with conflict and superior officers, where other people will cave and not hold their position. Certainly, he has not told me the story of, ‘oh, I tucked my tail between my legs and ran’, but I am pretty sure that is how he is. He is in his forties now, but he was doing that in his thirties.

Ryan will talk about some things with me, but he avoids talking about other things, where I just do not hear about it. Sometimes we will be at a function where there are other cops, and he will be talking about something, and I will have had no knowledge of it. He will have to sign something to say they will not speak about it, and there is stuff that he literally will not tell me about, I cannot get it out of him. I know it is huge, and he says, ‘oh, I’m going here again’, and I know something is up and he cannot tell me. It does not bother him, but it really bothers me. Then I will see it on the front page of the newspaper, and I will say, ‘ohhh!’

On coping individually with stress, and information shared by Ryan about the job:

He has not come to me with that many horrific stories. There were more when he was in his previous work. There have been some stories that he has not dealt with himself, but known of, or at least, none that he has shared with me.

Every once in awhile I will tell him, ‘I don’t want to hear about it right now’. He can be very drawn out in telling something. I say, ‘just tell me what’s important. I don’t need to know about what colour the door was, or how the doorknob turned, I just need to know you went in the house.’ Sometimes, I just want him to tighten it up a little bit, but it is probably more personality driven than police driven.
On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:

Some techniques we use might include time to ourselves, exercise, socializing with friends, speaking to work colleagues, speaking with one another, quiet time doing mindless, restful activities such as listening to music, reading or watching TV. We also try to be aware of when we are getting activated and how to respond to that appropriately, and then employ good communication techniques, but it waxes and wanes, so we have been moving away from that, and I am reintroducing it. We try to speak to each other respectfully, and when we are not emotionally charged, so when we are able to listen and process it. Ryan advocates strongly for being able to step away from arguments when he feels like he cannot be in them, although when he does that, he never commits to when we can re-visit that particular topic. So I have a date for dialogue and he has gotten off scot-free, because he says ‘I am in the trial this week, can I just get you to do it?’ I think sometimes he waits and hopes and things will ‘go away or disappear’.

This year has been hard, with it being the final year of my school and being off. I think there is a perception from him that I am more available to take the load in the house, so I have been carrying a heavier brunt. I am looking forward to going back to having a more clearly defined, shared responsibility. So for him not to presume that when he comes home, dinner will be ready, because it did not used to be that way, we used to check in about what to do for dinner, or how are we on the groceries. Now, none of that happens, it is just a given that I will take care of everything. So in the short term, that is just a little thing that we are working on.

Travelling is our thing, I would be on a plane everyday if I could. I do not know if it is a de-stressor. We like each other. I think he is a funny, interesting, and dynamic guy, and intellectually, he has a lot going on. He is a little arrogant, and I would probably say I am too. Certainly in his case, it is justified. He is a very capable, gifted guy. If I were seeking time with
another person, I would probably want to spend it with Ryan. Travelling with him is a delight, and before we had our son, some of the best trips I have ever gone on have been with him. Since our son was born, we have gone to France, Barbados, Bermuda, Mexico, throughout Canada, and down to the States. We are finally going to Hawaii too, we have never been there!

The only thing that Ryan has changed is he is more satisfied, happier, and content, so I like him better now. He is more assertive, but sometimes he has a quicker temper, that is the only negative thing, but it is an easy trade-off. I am different too; there are things that have changed me as well, so I cannot just take it and go, ‘oh, it’s the job’. Plus, what is the risk to not changing, to not pursuing those things that he wants to pursue?

I think we are more proactive in talking about things than before, but again, this is more a testament to the fact that we have matured as a couple, and have the longevity as a couple. Ryan is very communicative about his time with the psychologist. He tells me about some of what they discuss and this is a catalyst for further conversation or ideas that might be coming up for me. Basically it helps, as a bit of an “ice breaker” and it is a focused time of the year that Ryan thinks about the impact of his police service on himself and on his family. He will often ask me questions from my perspective after he has had this session.

Last night, we were talking about various topics before we went to bed, including the trial that he is working on, and other related stress, like me being unemployed, and when I am going to be ready to return to work, and things like that. I think actually last night was the most stressed we have been in awhile. Again, it had very little to do with policing, but we were able to talk, identify it, and name what it is we are feeling and why. Even things like, if I am premenstrual or whatever, I will own it and Ryan will know what that means. We are working together more as a couple.
Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:

Work does not have to define anybody. It can be a big part, and something that you are proud of, but be proud of the person that you marry, not what it is that they do professionally, it should not be the driving factor. I would encourage any couple to be mutually loving, supportive, and gentle with each other, and continue to make time for each other. These are the things that you want to apply to life, not just this type of work. Also, know what it is that your spouse does; I did a ride-along, and I am lucky because I am hardwired. I can share things.

Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for the police organization:

In terms of recognizing families, the police union is all about kids, which is nice, but it does very little to recognize different kinds of families. There is a Christmas party, but I think they would do well to do more things throughout the year for single people or couples without kids, like barbeques or things like that. They could also do seminars, inform the membership and spouses, and communicate to spouses more actively about what kind of resources are available, what is going on, and changes that are coming up. Everything is funneled through the member so if the member does not choose to share that kind of information, then the family does not know. I know when we needed access and we were in crisis, we were talking to somebody within a day. I think you need to be resourceful and advocate for yourself too, rather than wait for somebody to spoon-feed you. If you are a cop, you should be able to resource and advocate; otherwise, you are in the wrong profession.

Having been in the CF and seeing what they do for military families, the police department lags grossly behind, there is no acknowledgement at all. I think it would be fairly easy for the department, the union, or both to create a service that serves police families. You could centralize this information in a log-in, web-based service so that the member, their friends,
and family could all access it.

On her hopes for the future together with Ryan, and their family:

We obviously want to do the best job we are able to with our son, and raise him to be a happy, well adjusted, resilient child, and launch him to be a good citizen. We had toyed with the idea of should we have another child? For me, when I had him was the cut-off point. I had a traumatic birth, which deterred me from having others. Then, a few weeks ago, we were like, ‘should we adopt?’ But then we do not pursue it, so I think our family is complete.

I see being with Ryan, I definitely do. We are getting more physically active, I am running a half-marathon in November, and I am doing my first full in December. Ryan is hoping next year he will do the Grand Fondo bike race, because he used to be quite a biker. He did Cops for Cancer when our son was about one or two years old. I think he liked it, but he hates fundraising, he is just awful at it!

We want to travel more. Ryan can retire at 52, and he is pretty determined to do that, unless he is in a pivotal role in his career where it makes sense for him to stay. He would like to retire and travel for a few years, then come back and do something different.

I would like to establish a decent career, and develop some expertise, but work does not define me the way it used to. It was all about work before, and now, it is something I do, as opposed to who I am. We even think about how we will be grandparents. We will be participatory, active, loving, and available, because we do not get much of that right now. So I think those are the key things, to be as happy as we can. I think we are really aware that this is our life. I am trying to be better at living in the present.
Tamara’s story

Background

Tamara, 32, and Neil, 33, have been together as a couple for eight years, and married for three and a half years; neither of them was married previously. Neil has been serving as a constable with the RCMP for the past six years, and Tamara is a civilian employee of a municipal police department. They are expecting their first child later this year. They became a couple prior to Neil pursuing a career in policing, and got married following Neil’s training at the RCMP depot.

On establishing themselves as a couple (meeting, moving in together, getting married, etc.):

We met on a ski hill, we were at the pub having drinks, and we talked a lot. At that time, I was going to be a member, and I was in the process of applying with the RCMP, and a municipal police department. My brother is also a member, so that was my motivation.

It was pretty fun, Neil and I went out for dinner, and had an eight-hour first date! It was casual at first; we started hanging out, and then just became a couple. I was wavering on being a member, I did not know if I wanted to do it or not, and I did not pass the RCMP exam the first time around. I was waiting for the second time around because I knew what to expect, and that is when Neil said, ‘I think I want to be a police officer’.

On Neil pursuing a career in policing, and coping with the transition to the new career:

Neil had talked to my brother quite a bit, and my brother took him on a couple of ride-alongs. Neil was a personal trainer at the time, so he was into fitness, but he could not go higher up, and he wanted to move up and on. Neil went to the RCMP information session and fell in love with the idea of all of these different positions within one huge organization, and he really admired what the RCMP stood for. I really toyed with the idea of, ‘do I really want to be with
this person, because he is kind of stomping on my dreams.’ I am lucky, because two of my best friends, their dads were members; they grew up in the policing environment, and I leaned on them quite a bit. I thought, I will just take a step back and let him go through the process. I was going to do my second round with [name of municipal police department], and I thought, no, I will wait. I was a clothing designer for a kid’s clothing company, so I stayed doing that.

Neil went through the ranks and aced everything. When depot training came, that was tough because we were at the stage where we had only been together for about a year. It was like, is this going to make it or break it? Can we do this? We packed up Neil’s house, and he left three days later, it was so fast. I have a lot of family in Regina, so he hung out with my cousins, and stayed with my aunts and uncles on the weekends, so he had a lot of places to go to get away from everything. The first month he was there, it was terrible. I gained so much weight because he would never phone. I would get emails saying, ‘hey, I went partying this weekend and hung out with these people’. I have heard about what depot life is like, so I was really worried at that point. I was insecure, because he was over there and I was here.

At Thanksgiving, I flew out there. During that trip, we knew we were going to do this, and we just had that feeling. He did not want me to leave, and he said, ‘you have to book your next flight’. I could not afford it, but when I got home, I did book my next flight, and went back on the November long weekend. That was awesome. He wanted me to go to his parents’ house for Christmas. In our house, you spend Christmas with your family; you do not spend it with your boyfriend. I was never allowed to spend Christmas with anyone else, but this was the first Christmas that I went away. I took the bus up to his parents’ house, the trip was terrible, but I met him there. Neil asked, ‘what do you want for Christmas?’ I said, ‘well, what I want is when you move home, I want to move in with you’, and he said, ‘that works for me!’
Well, we did not know where we would be living. I thought, shit! Oh my god! Do I tell my employer and quit my job? Do I look for a new one? Do I look for a house? We had to pick 20 locations, and what we did at Christmas time was we picked our towns, we picked the major universities, and we picked all the towns surrounding them. That was the back-up plan if we were in a small area, I could go to school and get a degree in something totally different. I said to my brother, ‘two weeks until Neil graduates, and I still don’t know where we’re living!’ My brother started laughing and left the room. I later found out that he knew Neil was coming to his detachment, but he did not want to tell me, he wanted Neil to tell me.

Neil came home, we found an apartment and moved in together, which was interesting. Neil is an only child and I have an older brother, and our family is always in your face and loud, while his family, they do not say two words at dinner. It was so different, so it was quite an adjustment. I got two part-time jobs where we were living, just to make extra money. We got married when I was 29, and Neil wanted to get married before he turned 30.

I finally got on at [name of municipal police department], and I have worked here ever since. Neil’s really good friend that he graduated with at depot, kept saying, ‘you have got to get in with the police department, you will make really good money, and you will like the work’. I sent in my application and the whole process took about six months, it was crazy. Now with family coming, I kind of want to get out of it, because night shifts are hard.

On the perceived impact of Neil’s career on their marriage and family:

It definitely does have an impact! I decided when Neil and I moved in together that I would take a back-door role. I know watching my brother’s marriage fail, the RCMP is not a job, it is a lifestyle. I think a lot of wives do not get that. This is my own personal opinion, but if you have not decided to take that backseat, or if you have not decided to say, ‘my husband is
number one’, and he is, then you are going to have some issues right away. That is the way it is unfortunately, and sometimes I would like to be number one. He knows it too, and he is good to me. When he started on nightshifts, I said to him, ‘I am so lonely when I am home alone. You leave, then you sleep all day and you’re gone for two days. I’m in this house by myself and I don’t have a lot of friends.’ This is when we just bought our first house, and I did not know a lot of people. So he bought me a dog, a black Lab, and we have had her for four years. He is very thoughtful, and if I say to him, ‘this sucks, I hate this!’ He will say, ‘ok, let’s change it’, as much as we can. In my brother’s situation, my ex-sister in-law tried to diminish his career, because she did not like taking a backseat.

Some women just do not want to live their lives around the RCMP, and you have to do that. I think that is some of the reason why these relationships do not work. I know at my department, it is a lot more flexible, but you still have court dates, or you have a warrant to do on your day off. You have to adjust everything, including holidays and family time.

In our family, we cannot have a Sunday night dinner, because we all work shift work. It is tough, but our life revolves around that. On Remembrance Day, we have to go to a ceremony, wherever we are. Last year, I did not want to, because I was feeling sick at the beginning of the pregnancy, but I did. Plus, I have to sit by myself because he marches in with the members. Another thing is, we plan holidays around court dates. We planned a trip, and we could have saved $300 if we left two days earlier, but we could not because he had court, then it got cancelled two days before. That kind of stuff irritates and frustrates me. It is a huge adjustment, and it involves putting your ego in check.

Right now, Neil and I are on opposite shifts, so I only get to see him at night, and then he goes to bed. Because I am off during the week, I do not see him much, and that is tough. It is
like, ‘bye! See you three days! I will keep the bed warm!’ I will crawl out and he will crawl in. When he was on shift with General Duty, he was in full uniform and went to calls. It worked out really well because he got posted to a shift that almost mirrored mine, so it was pretty good. We worked nightshifts together, and we can talk on the computers together, and message each other to say, ‘how was that file?’ so we made it work. Now, he is in General Investigation, and he wears a suit and tie to work everyday, he hates it, although it is fun going shopping with the plainclothes allowance, I am not going to lie. He is just so stressed all the time, but we make it work, we have to. He works Monday to Thursday, and then he has a 24-hour cell phone on his hip all the time in case something happens. He got a call at eleven thirty the other night saying, ‘come to work, someone died’. So he gets up and leaves and that is pretty much what we do!

Planning for a baby has been a real challenge. Because we both work shiftwork, we tried for the first year, and nothing happened. We tried again the second year, and then we miscarried a couple of times, one we know for sure. The doctors could not figure out what was wrong. In talking with the doctors that I have now, they believe shiftwork had a huge impact on us conceiving, because your cycle is all out of whack. One of my doctors actually blames our jobs for us not being able to do it naturally, and on the stress of our jobs. You do not go to work Monday to Friday, you do not sleep, you do not go to bed at ten o’clock, and you do not wake up at six everyday. So she said, it is the craziness of both of our jobs, and the amount of stress that we both have that screws around with my cycle, since we have never smoked, we are both healthy, we both work out, and we love the outdoors.

We actually had to go to a fertility clinic, and this is the kicker with the RCMP as well, he is on a different plan than I am. Although we are married and we are both trying to have children, because I am not on his plan, the RCMP will not cover any of our medical expenses. If
he was the female and I was the male, the RCMP would cover everything from a boob job to fertility to everything! But they will not cover anything of mine, because I am not a member. We are having issues having a child, and our doctor recommended us to go to a fertility clinic, but they still will not. Even though Neil said, ‘this affects my self-esteem’, they said, ‘too bad’. We have tried every angle. We were lucky, because ours was only about $1000 per procedure, but it can go anywhere from $1000 to $8000 per month. If we had to go the more expensive route, we would have had to cover the cost of my medication, my procedure, everything.

We got married and started trying for a baby. We were just having fun at first. Then, all of our friends started having their first child, and I was like, ‘ok, why aren’t we pregnant yet?’ We had this one doctor, he was terrible, and he should not be practicing, he needs to retire, and it was the RCMP that actually recommended him. We went to him and Neil got tested. The doctor said, ‘this could be a problem; we’re not sure’ and he said, ‘come back in six months, and if you’re not pregnant, we’ll start doing something else.’ So we went back in six months because still, nothing happened. Then he said, ‘well you miscarried, wait a year’. And I said, ‘I’m not waiting another year!’

Neil started getting mad at me because he said I was getting obsessed with all of this and needed to relax. I knew there was something wrong. We went back to the doctor, who told me I was crazy and I should go see a psychiatrist, because I was nuts. I was like, ‘you don’t call me crazy; there’s something wrong. Why are we not able to do this?’ Neil said, ‘the doctor says it’s fine, it’s fine’, he is very laid-back. It bugged me, so I went to a new doctor. She said, ‘you know, there is something wrong. I will give you the forms to go to the fertility clinic. You fax them in when you’re good and ready.’ So we went to my parents’ for Christmas last year. They took us all to Disneyland, because my brother went through a rough marriage, so my mom just
said, ‘forget it, we’re all going on a trip.’ When we returned, we started the ball rolling.

We got a whole whack of tests done, and have been there eight hundred times. We had doctors and the past eight months I was fine, because I knew we had people looking out for us, and telling us what to do, rather than us trying to figure it out on our own. Neil said, ‘I am to the point where you need to go and talk to somebody, because you are crazy, you’re getting obsessed with this.’ It was terrible, because I would be working a night shift, and be ovulating, and I would go home and say, ‘ok babe, ‘let’s go, I’ve got an hour! It’s 11 o’clock at night; I’m on my break, let’s go!’ He would say, ‘seriously?!’ That is the way that we had to do it, it was terrible. Whoever said baby making was fun is a freak of nature, and probably got pregnant on the first try. It is work, and with us being on shiftwork, the stress that we have in our lives and my high blood pressure, my doctor says a lot of it can be attributed to my job, so that has a huge impact on trying to have a family. I found out that a third of the people doing my job full time has high blood pressure.

On planning for when the baby arrives:

Right now, I want to work. We bought our new house with the idea of having a live-in nanny. A lot of members have live-in nannies, and it is a heck of a lot cheaper than daycare. One thing I have thought of too is that I could do a daycare for members. It is something I have thought of quite a bit, if I want to work from home. I know two members that are husband and wife. They work on different shifts, so when he gets off of work, she brings the baby, they will swap the car seat, she will go to work and he will head home with the baby. But if he is stuck on something, she cannot leave the house. With us working shiftwork, it is hard – what daycare lady is going to take your kid at night? My in-laws are out-of-town, my parents are in [name of city], and they are retired. They will take grandkids over night, but I am not going to ask them
every week, because that is not fair.

A nanny would help, but I do not like the idea of somebody raising my kid. So we will see if I go to part-time. We planned it out that way, and it has been very methodical. Since I have a high-risk pregnancy, I might take time off early on sick leave. I will do nine months, and Neil will do three months of parental leave, since he wants to be a part of it. So I will come back to work early, that is the plan right now.

Neil can transfer within the RCMP whenever he wants. He has been at his detachment for six years. He said he would like to transfer when he is done the current position. We cannot afford to pick up and move again, because we would lose a lot of money with our house, so he said he would like to stay in one of the local surrounding cities. We have talked about moving close to his parents, but my pension might not transfer over, so we need a back-up plan.

On describing how she feels when Neil discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:

I interrupt a lot. With my job, I have to get information in a timely manner, so I always try to say to myself, ‘let him finish’. When I know Neil has done a hard case or I know he is going to be home late from work, I always make sure there is dinner in the fridge, and I have a plate that he can just heat up. I always make sure I have a drink in my hand to give to him as soon as he walks in the door, and let him wind down, and then he can tell me what happened.

Our departments are close to one another, so we deal with a lot of the same clientele. I know some of the people he talks about, or who they are associated to. We are lucky that way, because we talk a different talk than a cop and a regular wife that does not work in the environment. We know the same type of things, so he will vent, and I will just give him reactions, like, ‘oh my god, no!’ Or I will say, ‘he didn’t!’ I make fun of him, and I try to make him laugh too. A couple of times, he went on a child abuse course, and he had to watch a couple
of videos of children being sexually assaulted, then go through how to work on the file. With those more serious things, sometimes I have said, ‘okay, I’m done. I can’t listen to this anymore.’ He did not even go into detail, but he said, ‘yup, no problem!’

Neil gets jacked up, and he will talk about it. He will not say names, or if it is a huge file, I ask, ‘what’s the matter?’ And he says, ‘I can’t talk about it, we’re going to court.’ So instead, he will say, ‘it just fucking sucks’ and he will leave. I do not like it when he does not talk to me, but usually, he talks to me a lot, so it is good. I know my brother always talked to my dad. He never really talked to his wife about it, because their communication was terrible anyways, and she just did not want to hear it. My dad worked in corrections, so he gets the environment. I think it really helps when you have an outlet of somebody who understands.

It took me awhile to get used to the independence when he is working, and now I actually enjoy it. If he is on nightshift, I say, ‘okay, I’m going to go out with the girls tonight’ or ‘I’m having the girls over to watch a movie’. I will call my friend from down the street to bring over a bottle of wine. I really try to take advantage of when he is working or doing his thing. That is when I will do mine, so it does not interfere with our time; we do not get a lot of our time.

On coping individually with stress, and information shared by Neil about the job:

Work is so stressful, and you have to multi-task and keep on track, it can be nuts at times. We joke around and we are rude. We just make fun of it, but we have to. Same when I go home, Neil and I joke, and I sit back sometimes and think, ‘that was such a mean thing I just said’. Sometimes I have to catch myself outside of work, and tell myself not to be such a bitch. I do a check-in with myself, because sometimes I notice I do that a bit sometimes. It is all negative, no one tells you to have a good day, so we have to make light of the negative situations. If you do not, it will eat you. You do become bitter and angry. Sometimes I get
home, and Neil will say, ‘quit thinking about it’, because I will be huffing and puffing, and pissed off at a sergeant or a person I work with, or politics, or someone that made a formal complaint against me. I think that is why members sometimes have arrogance about them. It is like a parent going to a call where two kids are fighting over a toy, and the parent has to go, ‘no, no, no! You go to your house, and you go to your house, and don’t talk to each other’, and then they leave. It is like they have that authority already, not to mention they have a gun and a taser and they are allowed to use them at appropriate times.

With my work, we debrief at the time. We stand up and have a conversation, and we talk it out. We carpool, we hang out after work and we go for dinner too. We are like sisters, we make it work; we know everything that is going on in each other’s lives. We always bounce things off each other because nothing is ever the same, so we all talk about it. We are a really good team, and we help each other out.

Neil knows that if I am crawling into bed and I am still huffing, he will say, ‘shut it off’. We are pretty transparent with each other. I have to analyze everything in my head! That is why he always says to me, ‘stop! Quit thinking about it.’ I analyze to death, it is just the type of personality that I have. Sometimes, I watch TV aimlessly, or last night, I sat and started doing Christmas cards, so I do things to keep my mind off of it. The dog is great too, I come home and it is like she is saying, ‘hi mom, I’m so glad to see you! I took your sock!’ And then she runs around the table with the laundry. She is awesome, and she makes me laugh. It is a good distraction, since she takes a little bit away from it.

*Describing her observations of Neil’s coping strategies for operational stress:*

When we first moved in together, I was really upset. I said, ‘tell me everything!’ He would then say, ‘I don’t want to talk about it, I just worked all day!’ I think because of the work
I do now, I get it. I know quite a few marriages where both people are in the policing environment, and their marriages work, probably because of the understanding and knowledge.

If Neil does not want to be bothered, he will go upstairs and play his computer game, or read his book, or just do things himself, and I will leave him alone. When he wants to come to me, he will come. To shut things off mentally, he does not talk about it; he dives into a book or something. He needs to clear his mind, especially when dealing with things like going to a prison, talking to a sexual offender and pretending to be his best friend. I do not think I could do that. I would walk in there and say, ‘what the heck do you think you’re doing? Who does that to a child?’ Neil will go in and say, ‘hey buddy, what’s up?’ and be all schmoozy, since he gets more out of somebody by being nice than by calling them multiple names like I would. That situation is not reality; so, he will wind down from it on his own. I will go up and say, ‘are you okay?’ Then I just let him know when dinner will be ready. I also try to do little things like cooking or baking. I like baking for the members, just to make it a little easier for them.

Mostly, Neil comes and likes to debrief. Once he is done, that is it, so he is pretty good that way. When Neil tells me a story from work, I just listen and then say, ‘okay, is that it?’ He says, ‘No!’ So he continues and I try to make light of it by asking him questions like, ‘was he running around with a sock in his hand? Oh, a knife? Where did it come from?’ So he stops and says, ‘why are you asking these questions?’ I try and make fun of him, and he gets frustrated at me. I know it is important for him to get it off his chest, so if I am cooking dinner or something, I always say, ‘yeah, I’m listening!’ Or if I have to go the bathroom, I say, ‘hold that thought for a minute’ so that he knows I am listening, and I did not just leave the room. We normally talk about it first thing as soon as he gets home. Then we can relax for the rest of the night. We have dinner, he will keep talking about it, then we will just hang out, he will play
some game on his phone, I will watch TV, or we will watch something funny. When we go to bed, we do not talk about it. He has got his book in his hand, he is reading, and it is no work, it is all about what he is reading.

Neil is like me, and is somewhat of an emotional eater sometimes. I guess he is gaining weight because I am gaining weight. He loves taking the dog for a walk, he loves hiking, he loves going outside and clearing his head. We have got a trail in the woods that we hike. It is about an hour, so he will do that then come back and feel really good about himself because he got exercise.

When Neil says, ‘I want to go do this!’ I answer, ‘Then go do it, I don’t care!’ I like my time too, and we do not always have to do everything together. I like to grocery shop, and I do not like to take him with me, because he is painful and terrible at it, but that is my thing. I can tell when he wants me to go with him; we know each other pretty well. He just does his own thing and I let him do it, because if I did not, it would piss him off! If we want to do things together, we do that.

*On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:*

We will go to a party, where people there are not from the policing world. They will start asking, ‘what’s your craziest call, what happens when you’re on the phone? What’s your dumbest call? What would people say about this?’ Our neighbours had a Christmas party where it was like that, and we just thought, ‘thank god there was wine there!’ because I really do not want to talk about work. So we have adapted our friends around the job, because we are all in the same boat, we all get it. The main difficulty now is scheduling things to do with friends.

Our attitudes have changed over the years. Neil is a really nice guy, and when we first started dating, I thought he was not as forward of a man as I wanted him to be. We were driving
in the car one time, and a guy honked his horn and fingered Neil. I do not know why, Neil was
driving too slowly probably. Now, he drives my car like a police car, and he will talk about
other drivers and say, ‘what an asshole, what a prick! Look what he did, the douchebag!’ I have
to say, ‘whoa! Slow down!’ You can tell when he comes home from work, because he has a
total trucker mouth. He will say stuff, which he would never have said six or seven years ago. It
is totally the job; he has become more assertive because of it, thank god! For me it has been a
really good change, because he was too passive before, and it was driving me crazy.

Neil gets frustrated with me sometimes, because I do not always get out what I want to
say when I am describing things. He says, ‘what is it? What happens with that?’ I get frustrated
and I just say, ‘whatever, I’m not going to talk about it.’ We walk away from each other, and
then I will say, ‘sorry, I was kind of bitchy just then, and you were too’, and he says, ‘yeah,
sorry’. We make it work and we laugh.

We can tell when the other is stressed. When we have days off together, we try and go
for a two or three-hour hike. Now that winter is here, we snowshoe, because I cannot ski right
now. It is easier with the dog too, and she loves it. We are movie buffs, so we love going to the
movies, and we try to spend good time together. If we recognize that I have been baby-crazy,
then Neil says, ‘you’ve got to quit buying things for that kid!’ Another thing is, I have a ‘honey-
do’ list in my head, and we try to do it together. The other day, we went shopping together,
wandered around, and went over to a home store. We like to do ‘what-ifs’ together, so it is fun.

*Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:*

Do all your medical or dental stuff yourself, because your husband will not do it! There
is a number, but you have to dig, and spend the time to find it and do it. You have got to have
open communication, and if things are not going right – this is with any marriage – admit that
they are not going right, and try to do something about it. Just admit when there is something wrong, or when you need something that you are not getting. If he is too tired and you are not getting sex, just say, ‘I need this, and I’m sorry that you’re tired all the time, but is there something we can do to have more intimacy?’ Do that, and make time for each other by setting time aside for going and walking the seawall with a cup of coffee, or something. As a wife, you have to be so open-minded, and you have to just take it as it is. It sucks, and if you do not like it, then get out. It is sad to say that, but it is not going to change, and he cannot change it. It is a lifestyle, you know what you are getting into, and unfortunately you have to take a backseat to his life. You are making sacrifices and there are consequences, but he has to realize this is what you are doing. You have a parameter that you can work within, and that is the way your life is, it is run by the RCMP. Whether we like it or not, that is what it is, and nothing is going to change.

If things are overpowering everything at home, they should not be. They do at times, like for example, we never have Christmas on Christmas; it depends on shiftwork, and the job comes first. If you are having troubles with your marriage, I am sure you can take time off on stress leave, but just be open. If as the spouse you are not working in a police environment, you need to realize that he cannot talk about things. Sometimes Neil and I talk about things that we should not be talking about, but I have police clearance, and he has higher police clearance, and we know the same clientele.

Everything revolves around the work, and it sucks sometimes. You do meet really good people, and we were lucky, because I got to know the other wives, and could lean on them. This is easier to do, especially in a smaller detachment. I know all the wives, and they all know me.
Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for the police organization:

If there was a book available that spouses could open up with information and contact details if you need help with dental stuff, counselling, and other things, just on what we can do and where we can go. Or just a phone number to call and say, ‘I need help with this!’ or ‘how do I fill this form out?’ Resources for the kids and spouses of the police members on topics like moving to a new area would be really helpful, because we have no idea! It is so confusing with a federal agency because there is so much stuff!

One lady that I phoned said, ‘here is the medical and dental information, I will email it to you, just keep it on your email.’ Neil does not know anything about the family plan since we are on different ones, and he is so consumed with what he is doing when he gets to work, so he cannot easily find out the contact information for me. If I did not phone myself, I would not have found out. Even having some good books to read, or having a spouses’ blog or webpage where you can bounce ideas off each other or post a question, that would be great. If we picked up and moved, I do not even know what the RCMP would pay for. With the amount of divorces that happen at this department, I think they would be totally supportive of something like this.

The first six months sucked, because the members did not get paid at depot training, and they were doing work on their days off constantly, and finishing their modules. I asked, ‘is this the way it is always going to be?’ So just talking about things like that on a webpage for spouses, where you can easily update it, would be fantastic!

On her hopes and dreams for the future with Neil, and their family:

I honestly hope it gets easier. I know in the first couple of years, it was really tough. I have got some things that I personally need to work on, that I have noticed especially in the last little while, probably because I am all hormonal and crazy. I think with my brother’s divorce
finalizing too, and the things I hear and see around here with members. One member had to take
his wife home from a party the other day because she was getting a little out of control. It is just
sad, and I see it all the time. I see people cheating on each other, and it bugs me! Maybe it is
bugging me a little bit more than normal now, I do not know why. Because Neil is young still, it
is always a worry that I do not give him enough or support him enough.

Neil has this other life besides me, and I am not part of that, and I will never be a part of
that. One thing that I have really come to know is that he has bonds with people that I will never
have with him. I know that when you are married to somebody you have this bond together and
you are always together, but he also has this life bond with these people, and it is a really hard
pill to swallow. He texts his friends and they have private jokes about what they saw, and that
kind of stuff. Even though we have been doing it for so long, I know it is still there. I have
bonds with people that he knows about, but he will never be a part of that either. It does not hurt,
but it just sucks, because I do not have my whole husband, that is the only way I can really put it.
There will always be that separation, and it is like he is married to something else – his job. I
just have to deal with it; that is the way our life is, and that is the way our marriage is, and I do
not have a choice. It is hard, and I do not think a lot of people can handle that.

He will be gone for days, or he will say something at a party, and I will say, ‘you never
told me that!’ He will think he did, and then I realize, ‘that’s probably the time that I didn’t see
you for three days’. I feel left out. I am hoping that part gets easier, because I think that being
the wife, emotionally, is the hardest part of all of this. It is like I have my husband seventy
percent of the time. He is not cheating on me, but he is cheating on my time that we have
together. It is not his fault, he talks to people in the community and he sees people, and I just
say, ‘hi, I’m his wife.’ I stand in the background, and it is a double-edged sword, because I have
chosen to do that, but there is a consequence.

I want him whole-heartedly, but I do not have him whole-heartedly. I know he means that I do have him, and I know he will never leave me, or if we have issues, we will go to counselling. We have both watched my brother go through all that, and we have seen other members go through that, so we try and talk about it. Sometimes he says, ‘I hate you hormones!’ So he blames the hormones, he does not blame me. If he blamed me, the hormones would skyrocket! He knows I get jealous. I ask, ‘who are you texting at 10 o’clock?’ It was one of the volunteers at his detachment who had a question. I said, ‘she can text you when you’re working! Why is she texting you now? How old is she? What does she do? What the fuck is she doing texting you on your personal phone?’ What happens for you if that was your husband getting texts at night from some strange girl that he never mentioned before? I do not know who he texts on his watch. I totally admit that I check his phone. Not all the time, but I have once in awhile, and I ask, ‘who’s this?’ I do not know if he erases it, I do not want to know, and what am I going to do about it? I have some suspicions because of the double life, and I cannot do anything about it, so I just have to trust that he comes home to me, he is faithful to me, and he is not cheating on me at work. He always says things to reassure me, since I see it going on.

So that is my issue that I need to work on. I just do not want it to happen. I cannot have it happen, especially because we are having kids now. It is hard to have to share him all the time. My hope is that it gets easier as he gets older and moves up the ranks. It has been like this for six or seven years, and it is not going to change right now, so we just deal with it.
Karen’s story

Background

Karen, 43, and Brett, 39, have been together as a couple for 21 years, and married for 19. This is Karen’s second marriage. Brett is a seven-year member of a municipal police department, and Karen works full-time in an administrative role for a non-profit organization. They have two children, and were married prior to Brett becoming a police officer.

On establishing themselves as a couple (meeting, getting married, moving in, etc.):

I am originally from the East Coast. My dad is a pastor, was called to a church in Vancouver, and moved us all out here. I met a boy in our church at 21 and got married; it was a huge mistake! It was a very devastating and humbling part of my life. We ended up getting divorced and I wanted to get away from here and all the memories. I still had some family that lived back east, so I moved back when I was 22, found a place to live and a job, bought a car, and got settled into a church. This was just the beginning of a lot of healing in my life.

Brett and his family went to the church that I was involved in. Brett was the bass player in the band. He spotted me first; I did not really take much notice of him! We built a friendship, and we were both involved as youth leaders. We started dating for a couple of years, and got engaged. Brett was 19 when we got married, and my dad married us.

We lived in the east for a year when we were first married. Brett always wanted to move out west. We came out for a vacation just so he could get an idea of what it was like. He loved it and had some job interviews while he was here. So when we got back, I gave notice to my job, we packed up our stuff in our little car, and we moved out west!

From one of the interviews that Brett had, they wanted to hire him. We just felt that was a real answer to prayer, because we had prayed a lot about wanting to make the right decision, so
things were coming together. We stayed with my parents for a couple of weeks, and then we moved in to our apartment, I got a job, and we were on our way.

There were some hiccups and bumps along the way, with my history of coming out of a divorce, and my parents being very protective. Brett was a stranger to them pretty much. They had only met him a couple of times, so it was scary for them. There were some struggles, and it took about three years for Brett to gain some respect and a place within the family, so that was hard. He wanted to fit in, but he was not willing to allow my parents to control and manipulate him or our relationship.

Brett did not have any post-secondary education, and he got a job working for a company doing sales. He is very outgoing and funny, and just has a magnetic personality. So he had that job, he did well with it and it paid very well.

I became pregnant with our first child in ’95, three years after we were married, and we bought our first home. With the birth of our first child, that was a change in our relationship with my parents. They started to see how much Brett cared about his child and me; he was a really good dad, very loving, affectionate, and caring. It was an eye-opener for them. They started to have more respect for him as they watched him raise his family. That same year, a week before Christmas, Brett came home from work and said, ‘the company has gone bankrupt and I am out of a job’. We had a mortgage, I was on mat-leave and not working, and we barely had enough to buy diapers for our two month-old son. Brett looked for a job, but because he was young, did not have the education or the work experience, it was hard. He was off work for three months. For a man not to have a job, there is a lot of insecurity for them personally, and for us as a family, we struggled and the bills piled up. He got a job in February the following year, and I went back to work in August. I tried to stay home as long as we could but it was financially too
difficult. I did not want to go back to an office job, because I did not want to put our son in
daycare or rely on my parents. We did tag-team parenting for 12 years. I never went back to
office work, because I wanted to be with the boys, so I waitressed at a restaurant. Brett and I
were like two ships passing in the night. He would come home from work, I would be getting
ready to go, and I would have supper in the oven.

In 1997, we started trying to have another child. It was a year and a half of depression
and struggles, medical tests, doctors, and trying to figure out why I could not get pregnant.
There was just no reason, and nothing showed up medically. We thought we were doing
everything right. It was an emotional rollercoaster. He was very confused and did not
understand, so it was not an easy time for me. I became very introverted, well, just very focused
on that; it started to consume me. We were both still working and it felt like we were drifting
apart. I was frustrated with him because he did not understand or seem to be sympathetic. There
were a couple of moments where he said, ‘maybe you need to go see a psychologist!’ I was hurt,
‘sso this is how you’re going to deal with this? Telling me that I’m crazy?’ I guess he did not
know what else to do! Finally, I became pregnant in ’99, and our second son was born, so that
was an exciting time.

In 2000, I went back to work part-time at the restaurant, when our youngest was four
months old. It gradually turned into full-time, and I worked there for 12 years. I worked my
way up the ladder into management. That was not my goal, but just how it happened. Brett was
doing inside sales for a company, so he had a pretty good job with good pay, but he was very
discontent. Maybe he was going through a mid-life crisis early, if that is possible. It was not
exciting or fulfilling, there was nowhere he could go, he was just stuck on this ladder,
somewhere in the middle of unhappiness. We did a lot of talking about this, trying to figure out
if he wanted to go back to school or what he wanted to do. He had been thinking about policing. One day, I remember we were taking the boys to go swimming, and a police car passed us. I said, ‘you would make a really good police officer.’ He had been thinking about this career path, and had not said anything. We spent the rest of the afternoon talking it through.

*On Brett pursuing a career in policing, and coping with the transition to the new career:*

Brett looked into the municipal police and saw that he had to have post-secondary education, so he thought that one was out. Then he looked at the RCMP, and realized this was not a requirement on the initial application. He started the process with them and did very well. He is very focused and driven, so he started working out, did lots of research, lots of reading, talked to other people, and went on ride-alongs. He ordered books on how to write the police test, and studied. I remember him telling me that the depot training is for six months. I said, ‘what? We have two little kids! What am I going to do?’ I do not think they get paid for this, so we would have had to take out a student loan. There were a lot of unknowns, but that was what he wanted to do, so I was determined not to stand in the way of his dream, and wanted to see him be happy and do this. It became my dream as well. Every step he went through, we prayed before he would go, because we wanted to make sure that this is where God wanted us to head. Every time he passed, we just took that as confirmation to keep going.

Brett went for an interview with the RCMP, and I remember being at home pacing, looking at my watch, and wondering, ‘what’s taking so long?’ This was one of the final things before they would say, ‘yes, you’re hired’, then he would be heading off to Saskatchewan. We even started buying things for him to go, we were so sure this was going to happen. I was so anxious wondering and waiting. He came in the door with his head hung down, and I knew, I had this sick feeling in my stomach that something bad had happened. He went to the interview,
and they declined him. We talked about it, and he told me what happened. He said, ‘I don’t have the leadership qualifications.’ That just did not make sense to me, because he does! He was a youth leader; he was involved in Friday night basketball, volunteering as a coach at our church. We taught Sunday school together, and he was on the worship team. We were devastated, and there were lots of tears. We had booked two nights away in a cabin, just to celebrate him getting hired, that is how sure we were. I just kept saying, ‘I don’t understand, there’s something wrong, this isn’t right!’ I had taken this dream on myself. That evening he went out with a friend that he had met at one of the tests while going through the process. They built a friendship and he was also pursuing the RCMP. Brett said, ‘I just need to have a buddy to talk to’. I said, ‘sure, do what you need too!’ That night, I lay in bed and never slept, he was beside me sleeping, and I cried. Obviously, we have very strong faith, and it is like all the things leading up were preparing me for something that was coming next, but I did not know what that was.

We decided we would go away after all. We thought about cancelling it, but then we thought, we need this time together to pick ourselves up. While we were gone, we did lots of praying, and just before leaving to come back home, Brett decided that he had something to tell me that he could not keep to himself any longer. His heart was pounding so hard, and he was so nervous. We were standing in this cabin, and he said, ‘I need to tell you the real reason why I didn’t get hired.’ What happened in the interview is that it came out that he had an affair, which I was not aware of. That was back when I was trying to get pregnant with our second child, and struggling for a year and a half in our relationship, with him not understanding and me being depressed. It was with a woman that he worked with, who was a very close friend of mine. On hearing this news, I stood there looking at him, then the room started spinning. I could not
believe it. I said, ‘is this real? What are you talking about? This can’t be happening. Why are you telling me this now?’ He said, ‘I can’t carry this any longer.’ He had carried this deep, dark secret for a few years. A lot of emotions came out. I was angry, I wanted to wring his neck! I was so mad. When he finally told me who it was, I was shocked. I said, ‘what? We vacationed with them, and we see them every weekend. How could that be?’ How could this have happened under my nose, right in front of me, and for me not to know, not to pick up on that? It was devastating. Brett was absolutely broken, torn apart, he was crying, and I have never seen him like that. He just thought, ‘my world is over right now, she’s going to leave me, take the kids, she has every right to’. He could not carry that guilt anymore, so he really felt that God was telling him to confess. It was tormenting him for years. This relationship went on for a couple of years, and I had no idea. All the nights that he would call and say he was working late, it was not because he had to work.

He asked me what I was planning to do. I do not know where I got the strength to answer him. All I could see was my boys needed two parents; they needed to have both of us. I said, ‘I can forgive you for this, but it’s going to take some time, and you need to prove to me that you are committed to us, and our family, and you have to make some things right. You have to go further. Not just by telling me, you have to go for counselling, you have to take some other steps as well.’ He agreed that he would do that.

That moment was a huge change in our relationship, and if we could get through this together, we could make it through anything. I did not realize the inner strength I actually had until I dealt with that. I thought, I am not going through another broken relationship, and we have children. It was because of the boys that I thought, I can work at this; I can put myself out of the picture and just focus on what is best for them. I think at first that it was a mother’s love; I
wanted to protect my children from the devastation and pain of divorce or separation. I came to realize later that I could not do this well without looking after my own pain and hurt. So again, I turned to my faith. God is a very important part of my life personally, and our family life. We believe that everything, whether good or bad, happens for a reason. We put our whole trust in Him alone, that He will give us the strength to overcome obstacles and face our fears. That is a comfort like no other.

Obviously, I love Brett very much, and I was so hurt, I could not believe what he had done. What a selfish thing to do! It was not all roses after that; there was a lot of healing that had to take place. He had to do a lot of backtracking and building bridges. My self-confidence was pretty much shredded down to nothing. I became very paranoid of other friendships, and relationships. Asking myself ‘What is he doing? Who is he looking at?’ He went for counselling with our pastor. I told him, ‘the other person you need to tell is your mother; we need to have some accountability here. I chose not to tell my parents, so to this day, they do not know, and there are very few that do. I have a couple of close friends that I shared it with, but that is pretty much it. I just needed to talk things through, and find out – is what I am feeling normal? I read some books, but I did not go for counselling myself. That was why he did not get hired with the RCMP. They had asked, ‘is there anything in your life that your wife is not aware of?’ He thought, ‘there’s no way I’m going to lie, I have to go through a lie detector test next.’ So he told them, and that was an instant door shut because they said, ‘the other woman could use this as blackmail against you.’ I just thought that was very strange, that is what they said, so that is where it ended with him. So then he said, ‘okay, I guess I’m back to my deadbeat job.’

A few months later when were trying to build our relationship back up, I could see that he
was not happy. I said, ‘why don’t you apply with the municipal police?’ I was working at the restaurant, there were lots of police officers that came in on their breaks, and I got to know them a little bit. They would ask how I was, and the kids, just general chitchat. So I asked them about Brett, and they said to tell him to apply and see where it goes.

Brett did apply; he went through all the steps and more. It is pretty difficult to get in, and after every step, they just start whittling away when they do not pass. So again, we prayed. He did not pass the eye test, and he came home devastated. I said, ‘I am not accepting this as a no, there is another way around it.’ We were saving to buy a house, so we took the savings, and he went to have laser eye surgery, and he has perfect vision now. He was out of the game for a couple of weeks, and then he came back and sailed through. I think the last test was a panel interview, with five or six sergeants and detectives that grilled him with questions. The lie detector test was pretty brutal, that was a couple of hours. Again, I was watching my clock, wondering what was going on and why it was taking so long.

It was pretty exciting when he got hired. They had a ceremony, and he was given his badge and gun, which was weird. They are on payroll right away, and he got a salary while he was going to school, so that was a real answer to prayer. He went to the Justice Institute, so that was eight months of training, Monday to Friday. He did well, and I think his maturity level was there, like, ‘I have to pass this. There is a lot at stake here with my family, and a lot of money invested. Not passing is not an option.’ He would come home in the evenings, have supper, and then spend the rest of the night studying. It was the same on weekends, so I felt like a single parent. That was hard, just trying to keep everything going. Brett was there, but not participating or helping. I would have a conversation with him, but I knew he was thinking about his schoolwork. I am happy that he took it so seriously and tried to do his best, but on the
other hand, I was totally worn out, and I needed his help! There were a lot of sacrifices.

It was a weird time for me. Having two young children and working nights, I would get home at one in the morning, and I still had a baby that would get up in the middle of the night. I felt like a zombie most of the time, sleep deprived. Working in a restaurant, it is stressful. Then there was my insecurity from his affair, and having to deal with that. I always got these thoughts, like, where is he? What is he doing? Is he picking up with her again? Every time he would be late, I would have flashbacks and envision him with another woman. That was a pretty hard pill to swallow, and I did not have that freedom to talk openly about it, but that was my decision. I did not want my parents knowing the struggles in our relationship, and I did not want my boys to know.

Brett graduated from the JI and started at the department a few days later. He is good at problem-solving, decision-making, thinking quickly, reading people, all the things that would be important qualifications to be a police officer. He came home with stories and it was a thrill to see him so excited and happy with his job. It made him a much happier person, and it made the whole family dynamic different. As a woman, her confidence is based on her home and her family, her relationships with her friends, and maybe a bit on her job, depending on the person. I worked in a deadbeat job for 12 years to make ends meet, and the work was not really important. If a man is happy in his work, then he is going to be happy in other areas of his life as well.

Years would go by, and Brett would say, ‘I love this job!’ They do patrol for five years, and then they can go into a specialty. They get a variety of everything. He just really enjoyed what he was doing in patrol, he was good at it, and he became a field trainer. He is not in patrol anymore. Towards the end of the five years, he started thinking about the different things that he could do, based on his interests. He decided to go with [name of specialized team]. He had to go
through a hiring process with that, and he passed it. That was recent, and he really likes it. They are on-call a lot, so on their days off, they get called in, and they have their cell phones if something happens. There is a lot of overtime, and he has left in the middle of the night.

*On the perceived impact of Brett’s career on their marriage and family:*

Yes there is an impact; it is a total mind shift. He was issued his gun and he brought it home. I remember walking into the bedroom; he was sitting on the edge of the bed. He did not even want the kids to see it. Of course it was not loaded, but he was looking at it and had his head down. I said, ‘are you okay?’ It was reality all of a sudden, like, this is a real weapon that kills people that he is going to be carrying and be trained to use. Then I started seeing all the other tools, like the bulletproof vest, and the duty belt. He showed me all the different things on the belt, and what they are for.

It is interesting as a spouse, hearing the stories of things that normal people would run away from, he is running towards. Driving fast, lights and sirens, weapons, a uniform, it is all exciting to our boys. I hear sirens, and I am always kind of on edge. It is more so in the middle of the night, when I am locking the door, turning off the light, and putting the kids to bed. He is out working, doing who knows what, dealing with people that are strung out on drugs that are dangerous with loaded weapons that want to kill him. It is very different to think of those things. Being a spouse is not for the faint of heart. You cannot be somebody that is filled with anxiety, because it will destroy you. If you were already that kind of person, then to have a spouse that is doing this kind of job would be devastating for a relationship, and for you, to be able to get through that.

We have a very open relationship where we talk things through, and I need to know the facts. I want to hear what he is dealing with at work because I need to know, so that I can
process that. Everybody is different. He tells me, ‘this happened, I don’t know if I should…’ and I say, ‘yeah, you need to tell me’, otherwise, I start imagining things that are not true. It helps me to know what he is doing in his job.

The calls that he goes to, he is not going in alone. He does not want to be so much of a hero that he is going to risk his own life; although they are heroes, because they do risk their life to protect the public and their co-workers. Like all of them though, he wants to come home at night to his family.

They are well trained, and I think there is camaraderie amongst them. Dispatch knows where they are. They check on them, and if they do not hear from them, they will send somebody. Other patrol members will drive by when they know they have a car pulled over. I was not thrilled knowing they patrol on their own in the vehicle. They get better coverage that way with more vehicles on the road, but that does not give me a sense of security, knowing that he is alone.

It has changed the dynamic of our family. When his shift is over, and he has worked through the night, he is supposed to be home at seven and it is eight o’clock, there is anxiety as I am getting ready for work and getting the kids off to school. I am watching the clock, checking my phone, and wondering, what on earth is going on? Where is he? He knows that I worry and wonder, so if he has made an arrest or is stuck doing paperwork or whatever, he will send me a quick message to say, ‘working late’ with a phone call, but usually a text. Texting is a perfect way to communicate when he cannot take the time to actually call. That is all that I need, just to know that he is okay. If we can avoid increasing the stress and the anxiety, it helps. It is common courtesy to a spouse, just to let them know. We had to talk about it, and I let him know that when he is home late, I am an absolute nervous wreck, just imagining everything, and
waiting for that dreaded phone call or knock on the door that no police wife ever wants to have. If something ever were to happen, he said somebody would come to the door, and probably take me to the hospital or whatever, it would not be a phone call.

I believe it is very important to have a circle of friends that are police wives. You have that common bond, you understand. Nobody can understand what it is like unless it is another wife of a police officer. We have built some pretty strong friendships. We vacation together, we socialize together, and there is lots of communication. There are four couples and we all have children. It is good to be with other families that get it. The guys will be in one room joking with each other, teasing and talking and laughing, and then the girls are in the other room talking through things. We have made a pact that if one of us ever got that knock on the door, we would all be there for each other in a second. It is comforting to know that you have somebody that you can call to come stay with your kids, or just to cry with, you have that support.

Being in the police department, we are like family. I was quite surprised how they treat you. Those guys protect each other out on the road, and I know that they would do the same for the spouse and the kids. If anything ever happened to me, with a crime or with one of our boys, the whole department would be after that guy. That is comforting to know. I know too that they patrol around each other’s houses. So they do that, and one of the guys said, ‘yeah, I just went up by your house. Everything looks secure! Your wife’s car is in the yard, and the lights are on…’ [Laughs]

Police officers are trained and on the job they have to be commanding. Brett has to be a leader, tell people what to do, and if they do not do it, he has to take action, and that is hard to turn off. One of the things Brett mentioned that I forgot is that there have been a few times when we have battled that nose to nose. One day, he was taking the boys somewhere on a Saturday
when they were younger. I came downstairs, when they were eating breakfast and he was frustrated saying, ‘why don’t you have your shoes on? I told you to get your shoes on, now go and do it!’ He was very commanding and I thought, that is not him, he is not usually like that. He had done that a few times with them, and I said, ‘Brett, it’s not like you have to be anywhere at a certain time. It’s Saturday, and they’re kids! Give them a break!’ He said, ‘well, I told them to do it, I want them to do it, and they need to do it. I shouldn’t have to tell them twice, they should do it the first time.’ After a few incidences of this, I realized what was going on, and I said, ‘you need to leave your attitude and your badge at the front door. We’re your family, we’re not the criminal, you can save that for the street.’

Brett looked at me, and it was like he had a light bulb moment. I am going to be like a mother bear if anyone attacks my kids. I thought it was a little bit over the top, and I said, ‘you’re not coming in here treating us like that. We won’t stand for that.’ There was a change with him; he realized that it was not right and not fair to treat his family like that. Sometimes I have to remind him, it will come up again. I say, ‘you’re being a little too hard on them’. He describes it as a big shift, where you almost have to look at the job like you are putting on a costume to go and pretend to be something that you are not. So when he comes home, he has got to be Brett, the dad and husband.

Another thing I notice is he is very paranoid. It is understandable, since all he sees is badness. Meanwhile, I am thinking, everybody is friendly here! There are no drugs or gangs! It is rampant all over, he sees them all the time so he worries about me and about the boys, and there are certain places in the city that I am not allowed to go. He says, ‘you don’t know what goes on, I don’t want you going there.’ I know when to step down, and when to stand up to him!
He has that built-in sense when something is bad and dangerous, and if he feels really strongly about something, then I will not push him on it. I say, ‘okay, I will just trust you that that is right.’ But I had to tell him, ‘Brett, you can’t keep us locked in the house and protect us like that. We have to be free to go in the outside world. Obviously I am not going to go walking by myself in the middle of the night.’ I like to run, and Brett does not want me to go running by myself. I say, ‘pretty soon you’re going to have me running laps around the house!’ Sometimes he can go a little overboard if I am late, like if I stop for gas or pick up a few groceries, I have to let him know, because he gets really upset, and says, ‘for all I know, you’re dead on the side of the freeway in a bad car accident, I have been worried sick wondering where you are’.

On describing how she feels when Brett discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:

There are some things that are very confidential obviously that he cannot say. He will describe what happened, and some things he is hesitant about telling me, but I think that part of his coping too is being able to talk about it, knowing that my personality is not to freak out. I will ask him questions and just imagine it.

Every day that he goes out on the job, he is in danger. There was one time where he stopped a vehicle, and one of the people decided they were going to run. Brett chased the guy into a ravine, and it was dark. His boots were getting filled with water, so he could not run anymore. He was trying to radio, and they clip it on their lapel, and it had come off because he was running, so it was flapping around as he was trying to grab it so he could radio in his location. The guy he was chasing was trying to grab something in his jacket, and Brett did not know if it was a gun or a knife. He ended up getting the guy, but there was a struggle and fighting. He said, ‘I was fighting to get control of this guy because I didn’t know if he was going to try to kill me.’ He said he looked up the ravine and he could see the police cars flying back
and forth with lights and sirens. They could not find him, so they were freaking out, and he was holding his radio trying to give his location. As Brett was telling me this story, I could feel my stomach turning in knots, and I thought, this could have turned so bad so fast, and they did not know where he was to go and help him. That is when he relied on his training, and he prayed for protection. Often, I think, ‘I am sure glad you’re trained!’ No amount of my worry is going to protect him. I have to keep reminding myself of that!

Another time, Brett stopped a guy in this big 4X4 with jacked up wheels, who did not want to go to jail. He decided to ram Brett’s police car, and drive up on top of it. Brett was still in the car, and could not get out. He was trying to undo his seatbelt and the glass was crushing in. He did eventually get out, and when they arrested the guy, he had a knife by his seatbelt, so Brett reached in and grabbed the guy’s hand, because he was trying to get the knife. You hear these stories, and it is like, oh my goodness! In those times, I think, ‘wow, we do not have a normal family!’ [Laughs] He does not come home and tell me, ‘I got a paper cut today’ or ‘the photocopier jammed’, he is telling me all sorts of weird things!

The other stress in a police marriage is the public perception. It is very negative, and it is hurtful for the guys that are involved in it, but it is also hurtful for the family. You may know the real story, and there is always another side. It appears that the criminals have all the rights. The police arrest the bad guys, put them in jail, do five or six hours of paperwork, then the courts let them go. It is a revolving door; they pick them up again, and then they let them go. There is a lot of frustration. With the media, the perception of the police is that they use too much force. I think, ‘you’re not the one staring at somebody’s weapon. Police officers want to go home to their families, but they are not allowed use a taser? When complaints come in to the department, and somebody did not like the way they were arrested, the officer has to be investigated.
Brett has had a few complaints made against him, but it is always some parent who thinks, ‘my little boy, he would never act like that!’ Brett is like, ‘the kid was strung out on heroin, and he was fighting us! We are going to tackle him to the ground and put him in handcuffs. You can go easily or you can go hard, it’s your choice.’ It is not like they go in there aggressively. If they are met with aggression, they have to go a level higher than that for control, otherwise these guys will be able to take advantage of them. I am thankful that we have officers that are not afraid to take the risk. What would our society be? They put themselves on the line every time they put on a uniform and step out the door. Their family is at risk, and there is the risk of being recognized off-duty, especially when you are policing in the city that you live.

It has come up a couple of times where Brett was recognized. We have an agreement where if he sees somebody or notices that somebody recognizes him, he does not want that person to see his wife or children, so he will go one way and I just keep walking. We have ducked out of restaurants where there have been some pretty hard gang guys. There were a couple of them that used to frequent the restaurant that I managed, and I did not know who they were. Brett and I went in with the boys for supper when he was not on duty. He saw them and said, ‘uh…we need to go. Do you know who that is over there?’ They were bad, bad, people. After I knew that, I started looking and watching who they were with each time they came in. I could see they were wearing bulletproof vests under their hoodies, and I realized, okay, we are not playing games here.

There was a guy that Brett arrested that made threats to him and to us as his family, saying ‘I’m going to find your wife and kids…’ Brett was pretty shaken up about that, and so were some of the other officers. The department gave Brett permission to carry his gun twenty-four hours a day for a month. He brought it home and told me what had happened, and told me
the make, model, and colour of the vehicle the guy drove, showed me a picture of him, his name, and said, ‘if he ever shows up at the door or you see him, you need to call the police right away’. He could not be home to protect me all the time, and our phone was flagged with 911, so that if I called, somebody would be there in a second, so they took it seriously enough. They get threatened all the time and they know it is just the drugs or the guy is drunk, but Brett really felt that this was a legitimate threat.

I was very nervous. It was weird, we would be sitting there at home, watching a movie, I would look over, and he would have his gun in the holster. When we went to church, he had his gun. Part of me felt secure because I know he could protect us, but there was also that strange sense of insecurity, that there was really somebody out there that wanted to harm us. Thankfully, nothing came of it. It is still on that guy’s record, so if he is stopped in [name of city] and pulled over, this incident is flagged, and a message is sent to Brett saying this guy was stopped here on this date. If he were ever stopped around our house or anything, that would be a real problem.

*Describing her observations of Brett’s coping strategies for operational stress:*

Brett’s faith in God would be his number one way of coping, and then having hobbies and interests outside of policing. Brett is a very talented musician. He teaches guitar, he leads worship at our church, and he writes music. I would say his music is an outlet, and exercise is an outlet, he likes to lift weights and that keeps him healthy and in shape to do his job.

Brett has friendships with police, but also with non-police people, which I think is important. You become very cynical when you are a cop, and very paranoid of the world around you. All you see is bad stuff, and everyone is evil, everyone is a criminal, a liar, or a cheat, because that is what you deal with. You do not always get to see normal people, and you cannot always be talking about police stuff, it is good to talk about other things too.
Brett cannot turn off the policing thing. He is constantly watching, and aware of his surroundings. When we go to a restaurant, he has his ‘tactical seat’, where his back can be against the wall and he is able to see the doors. We even have it in our own house! If we are out with other police families, the guys will almost arm-wrestle each other to get that seat! I know my place, and where I am supposed to sit, but it is a fun game to play! At the dinner table, if I sit down at his seat, he says, ‘what are you doing? That’s my seat!’ I say, ‘just sit over there!’ He says, ‘that’s not the tactical seat, I can’t see the doorways!’ It is quite funny, but for him, he is very uncomfortable; he wants to be able to see what is going on. He scans the room, sees who is there, and if he spots people that look kind of iffy, he has a description of them. I would feel sorry for the person that ever did something to hurt us! Brett has a heightened awareness, so it makes me more aware too. I feel very secure when I am with him, I know that he will know what to do, and he will protect us.

I think part of the job that is difficult for Brett to deal with is anything that involves children, women, or the elderly. Officers are needed for innocent people that cannot fight back for themselves. Brett has broken down a couple of times when I did not see it coming. We were watching a movie one night and his choice of movies has changed since he became a police officer. You would think that it would all be guns and stuff blowing up, but it has changed to more comedies. We were watching a movie one night, and I was disturbed by it. It was gory and graphic. I could sense when Brett was sitting beside me that something was weird. I looked over and he had his head down, and he just started sobbing. He said, ‘I can’t watch that, turn it off!’ So I did, he just broke right there. I asked, ‘what’s going on? What’s happening here?’ I did not know what to do! I held him while he cried and he said, ‘I’m sorry, I feel like an idiot!’ I said to him, ‘obviously, you needed to do this!’
The next day at the dinner table, I was not home, but my parents were there. My mom told me that Brett broke down. The week before, there was a young boy that had died in a car accident and Brett was there and saw it, and it was gruesome. The effect that it had on him was seeing what happens to the family. He had the road blocked off at the scene, and there was a van that screeched up and two people jumped out, so he had to go over and hold them back, because they could not go up there, and it was the parents of the boy. They were crying, and he said, ‘I wanted to cry too’, because you start thinking how you would feel if it was your own kids. Seeing these poor people whose child had just been killed. Brett started thinking about what would have happened if that boy had gone a different way, or what if he had left sooner, this would not have happened. It is those kinds of moments that affect him, not so much the gruesome parts, which he says are shocking, but almost do not look real, they look fake.

As police officers, they have to deal with so much, and then they move on, they suppress it and do not deal with it. He says, ‘we’re expected to be superhuman and not have emotions. I want to cry with these people too, but I can’t, because if I do, I’ve totally lost control of everything! You have to pretend that you don’t feel anything.’ I guess that could harden some people, doing that over and over again, and seeing all the badness in the world. So how do you go back to a normal life, where not everybody is bad?

They do get a chance to process things. They have a critical incident debrief, where there is a counsellor in the room with everybody that was involved. I know that Brett has sat and done this a couple of times. I think on his benefits, counselling is covered if they need it. I believe the department has all the systems in place to support them, so that is good, but it is whether they want to use them or not. Sometimes they get their support from their co-workers, which is good, as long as they are not doing it in a negative way, like drinking.
On coping individually with stress, and information shared by Brett about the job:

For me, it is about my faith in God, and our church family relationships. With our church family, we encourage one another in our marriages, in our faith in God. We celebrate in our joys; and hurt and pray with each other in our sorrows. It is just so comforting to know that we have people to call on to pray and to give us support if we need it.

Having that inner strength to be self-sufficient is important for me too. I do not want to be so dependent on him that I cannot do anything on my own. Something could happen to him, he could be injured permanently, and I need to be able to support the family. I was almost like a single parent, having to do the grocery shopping, cooking, homework, and laundry, and then take the kids here and there and pay the bills while Brett went to the JI.

Having other people that understand me that I can talk to, like other police wives, helps. Also, having a relationship with Brett’s co-workers and not just their spouse is important. Then it is more of a personal connection, and then I know that they are protecting him, they have got his back. It is like you almost become part of their family as well. I feel free to go and ask them something if I have a question, or there is something that Brett is struggling with, I know a couple of people I can call and say, ‘have you ever dealt with this? How do I help him?’ I have never had to do that yet, but I could.

There are a couple of books for police families that are really good that I have read. I think just knowing that what we are experiencing is normal. It is good to hear that this is what people go through!

On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:

We have both changed over the years. We are able to communicate openly and talk things through. In Brett’s job, he has to make quick decisions and be commanding, and he is
trained to argue and win. So if we have an argument and do not see eye-to-eye on something, usually I am the one that walks away, because he is not going to back down. Somebody has to be the bigger person and say, ‘this is not worth it, forget it!’ I have to pick my battles, or we might have to take a break from it then come back. I usually have to get my facts together and not do it emotionally. He is not going to respond to tears. When you are emotional, you are not making sense.

There are some things that I will not back down on, like with the kids and Brett being too commanding with us. I think, ‘he is not going to like this, but that is okay, because I am right.’ If I feel strongly about something, I am going to stand my ground. Usually, I will say, ‘you made me feel…’ or ‘that really upset me when you did that…’ He can talk and manipulate and turn it around, and I become the bad guy. I say, ‘you’re not going to use your police interrogation tactics on me. That’s not going to work, I’m not the one that’s in the wrong here, it’s you!’ Maybe I should try to learn his tactics!

We make sure to spend time alone as a couple. We will go out on date nights regularly. When we had to get babysitters it was a little more complicated, but now that our kids are older, we will just say we are going out for dinner or a movie, or we will go for a walk or a run, or go away for the weekend, just to have that time together. We do things as a family as well, but we still like to date each other. We still like to hold hands, and a little public display of affection is good for everybody!

We have been through some pretty heavy things. Even though the affair happened a long time ago, it does not mean that it does not creep up, it does. When he became a police officer, as soon as they put the uniform on, women just ogle these guys. People are curious about police, what do they think? What do they do? What are they like? What goes on behind the gun?
What is their family like? It is exciting and they want to be a part of it. I think some men, and women too, can get caught up in that, and it can be a pretty slippery slope to get the attention. So it is important for me to keep our marriage healthy; that is a big priority in our lives. We want to love and respect each other, and to model to our boys what a loving, healthy relationship is. We enjoy each other's company; nobody can make me laugh as hard as Brett can. We encourage one another in our own personal hobbies and interests and also in our friendships with others. It may sound like we have got it all together. We do not! We have learned through the years that it is something you have to practice daily. To love, honour, and respect one another. The best gift we can give our children is to love each other. It does not matter how many times they roll their eyes when they catch us hugging or kissing; deep down this gives children a sense of security.

Knowing what his love language is, and finding out what is it that makes him tick is important, because everybody is different. We had to figure that out. Affection is his love language, and physical contact. It might not be mine, but it does not mean that it is wrong. Once I figure out that this is what he needs, he is going to give me what I need. We call it the circle of happiness! [Laughs] It is great, it works, and the more unselfish and giving you are in the relationship, the more you are going to receive, and the more you are going to give, and it just goes around. We have met some couples that have not figured that out. I know Brett has shared this little analogy with a couple of guys that he works with. You both have to be willing to participate in that, you cannot just be the one receiving, and obviously, it has to stay in your circle, you cannot be giving it to somebody else.

There have been a lot of thoughts that have come up in my mind, when I know that he is working a 12-hour shift with a female officer. There are common things that they are going to share, she is going to understand him, there are situations they can get into, and time spent alone.
It is hard to trust when I have been through mistrust, but I am very open with him, and I tell him that. Every time on our anniversary, he apologizes all over again. He says, ‘there isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t think about that, and how much that hurt you’, but it is not like I want to keep ripping the wound open.

**Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:**

Building relationships with other police families, and having friendships outside of that, doing things for you, and pursuing your own interests and hobbies are all helpful. It cannot be all police stuff; you need other things too! Read as much as you can, ask questions, and avoid sitting in your own imagination, that is only your perception; it is not the reality. The mind has a tendency to take you places where it is not real, so find out information. Understand his job, what he does, why he acts that way, what he is feeling. That is something that Brett and I have communicated about. You both have to take it a step further and you have to work a little bit harder to make your relationship work, and you have got to pick your battles. Realize that some things you are not going to win, so let him have this one.

It is really important to have an outlet, whether it is sports, art, and exercise, or whatever. There needs to be a healthy distraction. One of the unhealthy ones would be alcohol, of course. I think for a lot of people, that is part of their social life and I think it becomes a problem for them. Police officers see and deal with a lot of horrible, awful stuff, and how they deal with those things is often to drown it in alcohol, as though that will take the pain away. Well, it does not, it just causes another problem, and that causes other problems.

**Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for the police organization on operational stress:**

There definitely needs to be training for these guys at the JI level on the effects that are going to happen in the family. I think they need to be aware of that, and how to cope with the
negatives of the job. To not have that negative effect on your family because of the type of position that you carry, and to learn how to relieve stress in a healthy way. I think it would be great to have an experienced spouse available to answer questions and do a lecture with the spouses. A panel, where people at different stages can share their experiences, could work well, and I think it would be an eye-opener.

I believe our department does really well. They have police family events in the summer, they do a barbeque, and at Christmas time, all the families come together and they rent one of the schools. They do crafts with the kids, they have a gift for each child, and there are games and food. So it is just getting together and having fun. They can relax a little more; they do not have to fight for the tactical seat! [Laughs] I know there is counselling for these guys, although sometimes they do not want to admit that they need it. It is as though it is a sign of weakness.

*On her hopes and dreams for the future with Brett, and their family:*

I say to Brett, ‘keep up with your music’. He loves it, he loves teaching, and he is very talented. I can see him retiring doing policing. I think it is what he is called to do, and he is great at it. I encourage him to take courses, to do more and not get stuck in patrol.

Keeping our time that we spend together is important, and just talking. He is really good at that, he enjoys doing things together, and getting together socially with other people. With our boys, we want to protect them as best we can. Obviously, we will do everything in our power to stay together and keep our relationship healthy.
Lisa’s story

Background

Lisa, 37, and Lyle, 39, have been together as a couple for almost 13 years, and married for seven years; neither of them was married previously. Lyle has been serving as a member of a municipal police department for 17 years, and currently holds the rank of sergeant. Lisa works as a civilian employee at a different police department. They got married after Lyle became a police officer, and they have one child together.

On establishing themselves as a couple (meeting, getting married, having a child, etc.):

I was working at a local gym, and he came in regularly, so we had known each other for a couple of years. I invited him to a party, and he came with a friend, then we started dating after that. I knew he was a police officer, and I met him as a police officer, so I was aware of it. We moved in together within a year. It was his idea and I left it up to him to a certain extent because I had my own apartment, I was happy either way, and I did not want to pressure him. I remember driving home together after buying a whole bunch of stuff for our place. He said, ‘okay, so if we break up, you can have the cutlery…so if things go bad…’ I said, ‘whoa! Holy! We aren’t even living together yet! Let’s worry about the silverware when we break up and move on.’ There are so many things that happened outside of his job, relationship-wise; that I think it was more of a personal thing for him, but we just fell into a natural flow.

Around that same time, I applied to [name of police department] as a civilian employee and got hired shortly after that. It was nice, because I wanted to get out of what I was doing anyways, and Lyle knew that, so he supported the change. I have always said to him that if he wants to leave, or we have to move somewhere far away, I am okay with that. My job is great, but within civilians, it is all lateral movement, so I am not shooting for that position one day or
working my way up the ladder.

This was a huge chapter in his life and our life, because a family member of Lyle’s was diagnosed with an illness that would eventually take her life. There was a huge emotional aspect to it because she did not deal very well with it at all. We are not sure how it worked out, but Lyle became the liaison between her and other family members. She was not talking to anybody, and Lyle was the only one that really understood her, so she would only talk to him.

Right after this family member was diagnosed, we were going through a rough patch with our relationship anyways and that is when we separated. It was not for very long, about three or four weeks, and Lyle lived with a friend, then we got back together. Usually, there are no secrets in our personal life because of his work. It is a rumour mill with gossip. I have come to terms with the fact that Lyle is a very open person, but it took awhile to get used to his openness with our relationship. Anyways, I think it was a really terrible seven months. It probably started going sideways before his family member was diagnosed, and it was right around the same time that he was working lots. We did not have a normal life. There would be nights where he would work a normal shift, then go work overtime, then come home. We would go a day or two without seeing each other. I think it was an easy time to separate because there was so much going on.

I am very honest with my family, so I told them that Lyle and I had separated. I told my sister after awhile, but she is emotionally invested in it, so she would hate him if I told her to hate him, and love him if I told her to love him. When he decided that we were going to get back together, I told him he had to go and tell my parents, explain why he left, why we broke up, and why he felt he should be allowed to be with me again. They were impressed with that, and he did it! I was surprised, he has got a lot of balls that way, I would not have done it! [Laughs] I
thought that would be the thing where he said no, so to me, it meant that he really wanted to come back. When we got back together for the first little while, it seemed very much like that was not where he wanted to be, but he does not like being transient either. He spent most of his career living in people’s basement suites up until we moved in together. He has never lived by himself come to think of it, which is interesting!

Who knows, if he had gotten a place by himself, we may have never gotten back to together, or it may have been an easier back togetherness, as opposed to him leaving and coming back into the same situation. That was a crappy period, but I look at it as being easier because he had somewhere to go and things to do to keep his mind occupied to a certain extent. We bought our first house shortly after that, and then got married, and Lyle got a new position around that time.

It was Lyle who arranged for the caregivers for his family member, so in a way, he became her primary extended caregiver. When we got married, I was so worried that she was going to attempt suicide around our wedding time. Not that I thought she was doing it to prevent anything, but I think emotionally, she could not be there. Lyle wanted her there, and she could not go, but we got through the wedding without a major incident. We went on our honeymoon and I know it was on Lyle’s mind that his family member was back here with no one to help her.

I had our son a couple of years after we married, then I was off on maternity leave that year, then came back to work part-time. About two months before our son was born, Lyle’s family member attempted suicide. She ended up dying three weeks after our son was born. It was tough for me at that time because Lyle had been spending a lot of time away from home with work and being her caregiver. Things were not fantastic between us at that point. It was a tough time emotionally for him, and I think he needed to get rid of one obligation. He is a great
cop; he is really invested in it, he is proud of it and obviously wants to do a good job and did not feel that he could continue all of these things.

We had a rough patch then when she died. We had just had our son, and I was an emotional, hormonal wreck. I have talked to a lot of wives, and I do not think it is work related. I think it was just that we had this new being, I was at home full-time, and he was expecting me to pick up whatever he dropped off. That was probably one of the craziest periods of time. Then Lyle had to handle the funeral and liaise with the rest of the family. They were emotionally dependent on him, and I was emotionally dependent on him. I think that was a pretty freakishly stressful time for him. It was not like he had just started his job, thank god, because I can only imagine what would have happened there. His family member was an emotional wreck, and Lyle was becoming an emotional wreck too. I do not think anybody is equipped to deal with the loss of family.

On Lyle’s career in policing, and adjusting to the lifestyle of having a partner who is an officer:

Lyle had just started in a new position with the police department when I started dating him. He had come out of general patrol and gone into [name of specialized team]. I started dating him when he had a somewhat normal schedule, and I had a messed up schedule. It was hit and miss with getting together, and we just enjoyed each other’s company. To me, it was neat because he was a cop and the whole deal. I had to adjust my lifestyle to ensure that I did not cause any problems for him, in terms of the people that I spent time with. I just wanted to make sure that I did not do anything that would cause him embarrassment. I had good friends at the time, who were very cognizant and respectful of the fact that he was a police officer. They all knew him because they were mostly friends through my work at the gym. They knew what kind of person he was, so it was interesting, them getting to know him as a normal person, as opposed
to a police officer. It took awhile, but the novelty of it wore off. It was a novelty to me only because he had a good job! I did not really know anyone who had a career at that time, so I respected that. I did not have to temper my habits too much to adapt, I was just a lot more cognizant of it, very aware of police on the street, and of not speeding – that was the biggest thing!

My family and I have always been very supportive and respectful of the police in general, so it was neat to be involved in that lifestyle to a certain point. All of my family on my dad’s side is police officers, and my dad is very proud of that fact. So he wears it, like this is his newfound son! It would be harder for sure if my family was dicey! [Laughs] My sister still thinks it is neat, but she could not get over the fact that he would not badge everybody when they were parked wrong. I think my parents kind of rolled with it, and take the good with the bad. We had to teach them things like, ‘if you see him out, you can’t say, hey! Just pretend you don’t see him, then if he acknowledges you, great! If not, just keep going, it’s nothing personal!’

I would socialize with Lyle’s best friend who was also a police officer, but there were not a lot of big group events organized through his police department where he could bring me. So I went when I could, and I was the new girlfriend. Some people knew me from the gym, so I was lucky that way; I was not some foreign entity coming in. I think because his close friends were accepting of me, it made it easier for everyone else to accept me too. They were young and still liked to go out and have parties, so he was very good about taking me to the parties that were held. I was very much a part of his life.

I think a lot of times you either have officers who want their wives at everything, or those who do not want them at anything. I do not know if it is a conscious thought, or maybe it is an age or a time when they were hired, but there are a ton of guys here whose wives I have never
met. I go to every single event, whether it is a promotional party or retirement dinner, or whatever. We tend to go to a lot of these things, because I like to see and be seen, but there are some guys whose wives are never there, which is weird. It could be part of trying to keep the two lives separate. Who knows? I guess I am fun, but Lyle did not mind bringing me. I have asked them, ‘why didn’t you bring your wife?’ They say, ‘she doesn’t like to come to it’ or ‘I never really thought of it’ or ‘she wouldn’t be interested’. They talk so much about work at work parties too, so that might become a problem if there is too much information shared. A lot of them are worried about that level of disclosure. There are always going to be some things that Lyle cannot tell me, but I am privy to a lot of the same type of information, so he can talk to me. There was only a short period of time where he could not come home and talk to me about what happened. Maybe it is a lot different for ladies who do not have a connection.

I assume that most guys go home and talk about something horrible that happened, but some guys probably do not for fear of revealing too much. I am a little more hardened to it too. There is some traumatic stuff, and maybe some people’s wives do not want to hear about it, or cannot take it. I have learned to compartmentalize it, as I am sure they do too. I think some wives can handle more information, or they deliberately choose not to, and they are okay with that. It is about finding a way to cope. Some people cope better by talking about it, and others cope better by not talking.

I think if you come to a police organization and you have an issue with details, or if you do not want to hear a gory story, or you do not want to hear a swear word, or if you do not want to hear people get pissed off and rant and rave, then it is not the place for you. It is a very type A kind of environment where everyone is gregarious and outgoing. I am a separate entity in myself within my own department, and then I am also Lyle’s wife.
It is a close-knit group, and they do not like to stray too far from their circle, because they cannot. These guys cannot be at a party where everyone is smoking dope and drinking and driving. It happened very early in our relationship with a party we were at, where someone sparked up a joint, and we had to leave. We did not say, ‘you can’t do that’, but all it took was one time for people to be like, ‘oh right, he’s a cop’. It is not like we are asking them not to do anything, we just say, ‘try not to do anything illegal while we’re here! If you could really try not to do that!’ They have to be aware of where they are at all times, so they tend to insulate themselves and hang out in groups because they can trust each other, and trust that what happens is all going to be legal and on the level. If something happens outside of that, then that person is pushed away. They are not an insular group because they think they are better than everybody, they just have to protect themselves, especially these days, with all the scrutiny that comes on the police officers. They cannot even be perceived to have been drinking and driving, because the perception of it can become a story in and of itself.

Working at a police department myself, I think it was a lot easier for me to understand what I could and could not say outside of work. It is a huge learning curve! I think it would be hard for someone to be married and have lived a totally different life, and then have their husband or wife come into this job. All of a sudden, you have got a great big circle of friends, and you might have to weed a few out, and teach your kids that things are different and you are hyperaware now of everything that is going on.

We see so many relationships end at our departments. It is incestuous, because we are all such close-knit communities. Two officers start having a relationship, and in the office, she is already married to another police officer, and now there are three people involved and everybody knows! I do not have any concerns any more than the average woman does, but I would be far
more concerned about him cheating with somebody in his office than I would about him finding someone outside. It would shock the hell out of me if he ended up in a relationship with somebody who was not related to his work, just because there is so little time to meet people! That is what you see most of the time, where it is people that went to the same academy together, or they were trainer-trainee, and the relationship started during that time or later down the road, or they work on the same shift and they are always thrown together. Sometimes you work in pairs and they cannot avoid putting a guy and girl together for fear that one might cheat on one’s spouse. I heard once that the marriage divorce rate is over 50 percent, and it is even worse for blue. So when you throw the blue into the mix, all of a sudden, maybe it ramps up to 60 or 70 percent. It seems like problems come up later in the relationship too, where it usually turns out that there was something going on for a long time. There is always speculation at the department too, like if a guy and girl become friends and hang out, all of a sudden, there is a nickname for those two, and people start teasing them.

It was good that when we started dating, Lyle was only four years in to the job. I feel like I have been in it from the ground up. The first time he went on a patrol shift, the whole two days and two nights then four off was different. I was not used to shiftwork and getting up in the morning when he just got home. They have to do four years in patrol, and then they can start applying to different sections, so he went into [name of specialized team]. They have a certain amount of time that they can serve in each section before they have to come back out and go back into patrol, so that they can bring that knowledge back. So Lyle was on that team for four years, then came out for six or seven months, then he went on to [name of a different specialized team]. He came out of that after only two years, since his family member was passing. Lyle moved back to patrol for about two years, went on to [name of specialized position] for almost
five years, back to patrol for two, then he became a sergeant. It is a bit of everything!

On the perceived impact of Lyle’s career on their marriage and family:

Absolutely there is an impact! We always have to be aware of who our friends are, and of our surroundings. We go to a restaurant and Lyle sits in a certain spot because he wants to be able to watch the door! Our life is just one big, cautionary note. Again, I have never been married to somebody else, but it is the lock-down of the house before we go to bed, it is the concern of the driving, where we are parking, how I am walking to and from the store, what is in my car when I leave it, where I leave it, is it locked. I would like to think that everyone else is like that, but I do not think so! He is way more aware of my surroundings when I am not with him, so he is very concerned.

I think so many different aspects of our son’s day are dictated by Lyle’s job. Our whole life is dictated by it. Like anybody else, he has a job that requires him to be there when he does not expect to be. So I am the primary caregiver, my whole life is this, and 99 percent of the time I am in charge of our son. He is too, but only when he can be. So if he gets pulled out of it, or our son has a sick day, I have to stay home, as opposed to him, because basically, he has got the more important job.

We were talking about sending our son to camp in the summer. Not overnight, but just to a day camp through a religious organization. He is concerned about that, like it is the religious camp counsellors who have a lot of issues with young children, according to him, so that is his hesitation. We send him to camp through the recreation centre all the time and we just say, ‘here you go, see you later’. Now all of a sudden, he is concerned! I think it is just the fact that it is a religious-based camp. That is not why we are going to send him there, although he will have some bible study, but for me, I think, ‘oh that’s great! He is going to learn about that’, because I
do not have any answers for him, and he has a lot of questions. Lyle’s response is, ‘I don’t know
about that.’ I say, ‘don’t ruin it for him, this is very exciting!’

I think our son’s life, whether he realizes it or not, is going to be wrapped in blue. It is
going to be interesting to see how he deals with it as he grows up and how people treat him
because his dad is a police officer. When he hits high school, people are either going to care a
lot that his dad is a police officer, and maybe he will feel like he has to rebel against it, or they
will not care at all. You see some kids go in the opposite direction, where their dad is catching
the bad guys, and then they become a bad guy. Or else, nobody sees them because they are
tucked away and home-schooled. He is really proud of his daddy, he loves that he is a police
officer, and he is very aware of bad guys and breaking the law. He is hypervigilant about laws,
and he is my speed checker! He says, ‘Mom, it’s 60 here, and you’re doing 70! What are you
doing? But that’s okay because daddy can get you out of it can’t he?’ I say, ‘no! This is
something that Daddy cannot get me out of!’ He cannot, and he tells me I am on my own!

I warned Lyle, now that our son is in school; he is going to meet lots of kids. He
has already found a wife, and we got to meet her family! [Laughs] Especially as he gets older
and gets more involved in things, and we start seeing a lot of the same people all the time, we
will meet other parents and start thinking, should we have them for dinner? One of the big
reasons we chose the school that he goes to was the quality of people that go to there, in the
hopes that we would not end up in a situation where his best friend is some crackhead’s son.
You cannot predict that kind of stuff, so we looked at different schools. We have been talking
about it since he was two, because we are privy to so much information, especially Lyle, with his
position where he is always meeting people, talking to people, and seeing things. The things we
can control, we attempt to control as much as possible with way too much information. It always
permeates every bit of our life and his life. We are even looking at where he will go for his high school education. One of the schools we were looking at is having gang problems right now, so Lyle said, ‘he’s not going there’. I said, ‘it’s 10 more years, so maybe it will clean itself up by then!’ It makes me feel better to a certain extent to know all of this information, but I realize how much horrible stuff is happening, and there are people out there that I see all the time who are doing it. Sometimes it makes me want to move, but then I would be in a totally different environment and would not know what is going on. I do not know if I could do that!

Our friends are mostly other members. I think that will change now that we have our son in school. My sister is my best friend, so I usually hang out with her if I am not with Lyle. I have a group of girlfriends from before, and we have reconnected. Lyle and I have separate friends that we see on occasion, spend time with, and consider good friends, but his best friend is a police officer and most of the stuff we do is with other officers and their spouses.

We just came back from holidays and we went with another couple that we met through a police friend, who are not police members themselves. That was our first foray into a non-policing adventure, but we have known them for a little while and they are good people, so it worked out well! We were talking about it when we were away. These people have never been police officers, and do not have a family member who is a police officer. I think it opened Lyle’s eyes to the fact that there are people out there that you can spend time with, who are good people!

When we went on this vacation, it was interesting to see him away from work and away from people who know him through work or because of work. He was definitely relaxed; I have not seen him that relaxed in his personality for a long time. I know what he is like with me, but you tend to bring out the best and worst in your spouse. So to see him at his best and relaxed, it
was really neat! These people did not care that he was a police officer. They cared, but they are good people. When he gets into police mode, his whole voice changes and he answers their questions like they really care. So when he is asked a random question, he says, ‘well…’ and he delves into it, and it is the best, honest answer that he can give you, but like, holy crap! Consider the venue!

When I first started dating Lyle, a lot of my friends said, ‘he is nothing like what I thought he would be!’ I said, ‘this is what most of them are like! They’re just normal people if you take away the blue part of it!’ They are not superheroes, well, depending on who you talk to. [Laughs] A lot of people treat you differently when they find out you are a police officer. People do the, ‘hypothetically speaking’ questions. Lyle does not mind answering questions when he is out mowing the lawn or whatever. We know our neighbours, and we have got a great neighbourhood. Lyle is very much in the forefront; he is not shy or reserved, so our door gets knocked on often. People forget that they are just people, and it is a job. Lyle has a good job, but there is a whole, higher level of expectation for him from the community, his police chief, and his family. Officers still mow their lawns, drive their kids to school, and they might get into a car accident. Who knows, they might get caught drinking and driving. They know it is wrong, but it is hard to make really good decisions when you are drunk, whether or not you are a cop. So the same crappy things that happen to other people happen to police officers too. They have all this stuff that they still have to deal with, then go to work and be the perfect cop, and be on the higher pedestal.

On describing how she feels when Lyle discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:

Lyle will have good stories, like funny things that happen. It is usually people that had something funny to say, or who changed their mind and treated him better. I would be shocked
to learn fifteen years down the road that he was really emotional about something that built up, and all of a sudden it explodes. I think he talks mostly about the calls with kids and dogs.

I know when Lyle was with [name of specialized team] he had to internalize, and I do not think it was good for him during that point, and not the best time for us. Part of it was, he was always at work, there was always stuff going on, and he could not tell me about a lot of it. There was a lot expected of him at work, and he was out of his element, he was with a different group of people, under the authority of a different group, and he got quieter than normal. I know when he is thinking about something to do with work, he gets a lot quieter. Our relationship suffered, but I do not know if that was a symptom or a cause.

Lyle does not really talk about it that much. The positions that he has had are ones where he would not get into too much. Lyle has been lucky. Honestly, he has not been the first responder to as many horrific crime scenes as some officers, and I think there are some guys who just get the crap end of the stick and they are. For me, a stressful situation would be something horrific, like a child dying. I like it when Lyle talks to me, although sometimes he internalizes it and takes it out on me. So I know if he comes home just full on grumpy, that something crappy happened at work. I am bad, because I plague him with questions trying to figure out what went wrong.

I remember a few occasions where he has come in and told me about horrible things, that were things that I knew affected him, because he spoke so specifically. I care, and I know that it is a big deal when Lyle does vent to me, I know it must be if he is bringing it up. It makes me want to help him deal with it more. The last little while, it has been internal stuff mostly. It is more banter, and I try and do it so that I ask him a more obvious question, like, ‘why don’t they just do it this way? Explain to me what you would do and why you can’t do that and why you
can’t bring it up to that, and why would it be impossible to do that?’ So that he can get out why they are not doing it that way. He is so good at seeing both sides of it. I am sure I drive him insane. He says, ‘I already know that!’ I just try and get him to talk about it, and he likes to talk. Basically, he talks himself through it until he says, ‘there’s nothing I can do about it.’ At first, I was just curious, and it was probably just annoying questions that came out of me. Then I realized, ‘hey, this works!’ [Laughs] I was seeing the same pattern of things being complained about, so I learned ways to try and help him, and he is much more relaxed about it that way.

He is a guy, so he always tries to solve my problems. I do not try to solve his, because god only knows where they are supposed to go. [Laughs] It is a combination of sympathizing and at the same time, just letting him get it out. Half the time, most people just want to talk and get it off their chest. That is what I want. I am not looking for anyone to solve my problems, because I know they cannot be solved. I just want you to hear about this stupid thing that this person did, and then tell me I was right, so then I feel good about myself again! Stroke the ego!

Sometimes we have information that we cannot share and that kills me. Lyle will tell me something, and they have not released it as public information yet, so I cannot say anything. It kills me to know certain things that I cannot tell other people. It just goes back to how it affects my life. Again, I know too much! I am more suspicious of random strangers who smile at me like they know me.

Describing her observations of Lyle’s coping strategies for operational stress:

Lyle is probably the only one that has had a really good job in his family. I think they are extremely proud of him, especially since it was all his doing. He decided he was going to be a police officer when he was young, and he worked towards it. He is the type of guy who says, ‘okay, this is my objective, and I’m going to fulfill it. Done! What’s the next one?’
I know that his first day back on patrol, there was a girl that was killed, and he was the one who had to tell the family. We were just married and that affected him because he was closer to having young kids and worried about the future. He said that the worst thing that happened when he first started was a kid was killed [description of tragic incident]. He said that was shocking for him.

He does not have an issue with pictures and things like that, and he strikes me as the type of personality that is able to, not internalize it, but to not take it on himself, and to be able to step back. With a lot of older officers, I think it is the build-up of stress. I think there are a lot of people where blood and guts do not affect them. Officers seem to have a lot more of a difficult time with next-of-kin notifications, like when good people die for no good reason, rather than when they are actually reacting to the scene.

It is funny, but most of the officers do not believe in psychiatry, so the last people they are going to go see is a psychiatrist, unless the court mandates it! They like the debriefings, I think because it is a group, everyone experienced the same thing, and a lot of people voice what others cannot, and they know it stays there. Lyle is part of the critical incident team at his department as well, so he is a trained guy. It does not happen too often that there is a debriefing, but any time there are kids involved or something really messy that happens, they try to get everyone together. They know that different things affect people in different ways.

If you or your family needs the psychological services, they are there. Up until this point, you have had to submit your receipts, so nobody was doing it, so you know that even if these guys wanted to or needed to, they would not do it in [name of city]. Now everything can be done online, it is not like you have to come in and ask for the forms, there are a lot of things that can be submitted privately. They do not submit records to the department that say, ‘this guy went to
this doctor’, so it is less personal than it used to be. You definitely do not want hundreds of other people knowing. There is just a stigma in general for a lot of people, like if you need to talk to someone, then you need help, you must be crazy, or you definitely have some issues. I think a lot of them were worried about it being brought up, if something was ever clinically wrong. Who knows if that would be subject to investigation, and if they were on the stand, the defense could say something.

Lyle has his way of coping. The things that piss him off most are those that happen internally, and in the justice system in general. I think he has worked it out that he is going to deal with goofballs and losers. It is how his department and the justice system force him to deal with it, that is what kills him. He sees new people coming in who are already hardened to the system, where they know if they do all this work, nothing is going to come of it, so they do not really do it all. They think, ‘it’s not going to happen, so why even bother’. Except, you still need to do all that work, because one day, who knows, this time might be the time! Lyle vents a lot about that.

Lyle is addicted to his laptop, so he will leave work, come home, open up his email from work and see what is going on. There is 180 percent dedication there. He actually left his phone at home when we went on our holiday. I thought that was a big step in his life! [Laughs] I noticed he was more outgoing, goofier, and less worried about what people would think. It was a nice change, and he is an entertainer! [Laughs] It was nice to see him just chill out, and not be a cop, and just put the wallet away. He has to carry his badge at all times in Canada and the United States, and has to identify himself as a police officer, so he is always on the job. We actually had the discussion, I said, ‘you’re not carrying your badge around’. He brought it with him because we were stopping in the States, but he did not bring it with him when we went out,
well, not that I know of. He was not always on the watch for something.

Even though he probably does not realize it, he is always on the watch. Like he tempers how much he drinks, to make sure he is not drunk. He is very conscious of that, he says, ‘if I get caught drinking and driving, not only is it my career, it is also how I’m perceived. If I’ve pulled someone over for drinking and driving and go to court, all of my testimony, everything that I have ever done in the history of my career is going to be questioned.’ It is not worth it for him, and it could ruin everything that he has worked towards.

The media plays a big role in policing now, and the frustration of officers is building. It is so frustrating because people tend to be black and white about that. Lyle does not like the media very much, and he is quite distrustful of it. It is a good information tool, but it is mostly negative about the police. How often do you ever hear a real feel-good story? The firemen are always the heroes, and the policemen are always the assholes of the situation. It is hard for Lyle to see that they do not really explain what happened, there is so much misinformation, and everyone accepts it. It frustrates him that the information is out there, and the media outlets choose not to put forward certain things, because it is not sensational! So it becomes much easier to hate the cops than to like the cops.

We watch a lot of news. I have learned a lot, and I have learned to hate it too, because I care too much. Lyle is my husband, and there are all these good people that I work with. There is always going to be a bad apple in the bunch, no matter what job you are in. There are members right now that are in trouble and they could be losing their jobs. That affects everybody because they like these guys and they see how one little mistake can impact your entire life, and it drives that home. They are not rallying behind them and saying nothing is wrong, they are just shaking their heads saying, ‘one bad decision…’ Again, you see in the
media that the cops are judged by the actions of one. So every little stupid thing that you do, if you think it is no big deal, it really is a big deal.

I think when they have to investigate other police departments, they are probably harder on other police than any civilian watchdog might be, because they know what investigative avenues should have been taken that could have been taken. Officers get accused of things all the time, and if someone makes a formal complaint, every complaint has to be investigated. Can you imagine if every time you did something or made some small mistake, someone was put in charge and went through all of your reports and interviewed you and made sure that you did just spell that word wrong?

Lyle has got an incredible coping mechanism, but he does not see how the stress that builds up in him comes out. He thinks he copes great, and if there are any issues, no one sees it, and that is good. He does not know what I am talking about when I say, ‘you’re being a total crab, what’s going on?’ He is a bit narcissistic that way, but that is always the way it has been. He has always been in his own little world, and if you are allowed into it, you are all still rotating around the sun that is called Lyle. [Laughs] He has a good attitude, which helps him deal with it. He can say, ‘it is what it is. There’s nothing I can do. The way that we’re told to react is to be smart and do what we can do within legal reasons, to do what we want to do…’ So if you cannot arrest the guy, maybe you can shame him into not doing it again, and have a good discussion with him.

Lyle has told stories about going to people’s houses at midnight on Christmas Eve, and knocking on their door because there was a domestic, but there were no visible injuries so he could not do anything. So he would say, ‘come on man! You should be ashamed of yourself. You’ve got kids, this is the best time of year for them, don’t ruin it. This is the memory that
they’re going to hold with them.’ I think he is a lot more powerful with his words, so he has his tool. He is not the type of guy to push people around or anything, he is much more comfortable talking to people and convincing them to do the right thing, or doing things to draw people out without them knowing that he is drawing them out and trying to solve the problem. He is a really good bull-shitter, so you cannot argue with him, you have got to roll with it.

Lyle compartmentalizes people and I think it makes it easier for him to deal with situations outside of his realm. He is a great cop, but because of that, he has a hard time with relationships outside of that. He is a friendly guy and you can talk to him, but once he knows you, he puts you in a certain position. You are there until you do something to change it, big or little, just something outside of what he thought you would be. If he did not expect it, all of a sudden, he is like, ‘hmm…’, you have thrown his whole theory off, and now he has to find a way to work his theory back on you, back to his original thought process.

Lyle’s friend, they see each other at work and chitchat. I have my sister, who is my best friend. Then, I have my girlfriends, and we arrange play dates and things. When Lyle makes fun of me for talking on the phone with my sister, I say, ‘get a friend!’ He has his football buddies, his soccer friends and his work buddies, but he just does not have that one true confidant. Maybe it is a guy thing. It is sad that he does not have that, and I assume he gets out what he needs to get out to his friend at work. I think it is like a brotherhood thing, so he always has somebody, but it is not an everyday thing. I think he is missing out on that aspect of it. If he were asked, he would say that [name] is his best friend. If something was really bad, like when his father passed away, he went for a walk, and I said, ‘do you want me to call [name] to call you?’ He said, ‘yup.’ So they connected, and he tells him guy things, or whatever he feels he cannot tell me. That is why I have no problem with psychiatrists and stuff, because I think you
always need somebody who does not have any involvement in your life just to listen, even if they are not solving your problems for you.

_On coping individually with stress, and information shared by Lyle about the job:_

Does anyone really learn to cope with stress? I personally get overwhelmed sometimes with day-to-day things and work through it as best as I can, whether I talk it out with my sister or grab a pillow and scream in to it so no one can hear! My doctor recommended that one, and it really works!

I try to avoid stress at home by ensuring the things that I can take care of are done, like bills, household repairs, and chores, so it is one less thing that Lyle has to worry about. I cannot do anything about the day-to-day realities of policing for him, as much as I wish I could. Realistically, each person has personal stress about different things outside of work, so there is only so much I can be responsible for there, too. I think we are very fortunate that we are secure financially and that definitely eases some normal stress on a relationship. We still argue, but we do not do it often. I have come to realize that Lyle is not a “talker” when it comes to what is stressing him out. I try to ask questions and get him to talk when I sense there is something wrong, but there is a fine line between that and starting a fight! I have no solution for the cumulative stress that I know is building in him. I only hope that his way of dealing with the day-to-day stuff alleviates some of the long-term effects of his job.

_On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:_

I am black and white, and Lyle is more grey. He is much better at reasoning, and has the ability to see the good in the bad situation, or see how the other side sees it. I am terrible at that, so he is a good temperament to my personality that way. Our relationship has really changed over the last couple of years, especially with the introduction of our son. I am living for him. He
is my world now. He is his world too, and I think he is in awe. He wanted a boy, so we are very happy about that. He did not have much parenting growing up, so he is doing a lot of stabs in the dark, and there is a lot of his personality coming out. Lyle has a high level of expectation for all of us. He demands – well, not demands perfection – but he has a higher level of expectation from him, from me, from family. The people that he loves, he expects more from, and I see that in the way that he deals with our son. He is getting older, he is more vocal and can tell him why he is doing things, and I think it is really affecting the way that he reacts with him.

I see our son all the time. Now that he is at school, not half as much, but I have a much easier read of why he is doing things or what else happened during the day to cause something. Whereas Lyle might come home and he will get bratty for a minute, and he will say, ‘that’s unacceptable’, I know that he has been up since six in the morning, and he did not get any sleep and he was feeling sick and he had an earache, and all the things that build up into that moment. Lyle is getting much better at being curious as to what happened during the day to try and figure out why. He will get mad at him for something, so I will say, ‘I am curious, what happened? Two minutes ago he was happy, and now he is crying because he got in trouble. I just want to know what happened that would cause you to get so angry at him, what did he do?’ Lyle has a definite idea of what is expected in certain situations, and he pigeon holes people into what level of expectation he has of you. If you go outside of that level of expectation, then he questions why you did that. So he has a level of expectation for our son that I think is slightly advanced. He is a smart kid, there are a lot of things that he is really good at, and he has a lot of questions, so Lyle puts him in a higher category. Then when he acts like a five year-old, he says, ‘no, no. You’re not allowed to act like a five year-old, you’re smarter than that!’

Lyle realizes that he has something else in his life that he has to work around, and it is not
just work, it is family. If he wants to play sports or whatever, he can go and do his thing, and I will do mine. My whole life has to be about our son. If he is sick, or school is cancelled, all of those things affect my life and me directly, and everything I have planned for the day. I make plans after I have conferred with our calendar and what Lyle is doing. So it is very easy for him to say yes or no, where I am like, ‘just a second’. So I have to figure out what his schedule is. Even if he knows his schedule and I ask him to do something, a week later, he says, ‘I have this meeting now.’ So now my whole schedule has to change because his comes first.

I think probably in every relationship, there is one dominant career. Lyle could never be married to another police officer, because their two personalities would not work. They would be competing with each other for time and energy. I tease him all the time, saying, ‘you’ll never leave me for a cop! The relationship wouldn’t go anywhere so don’t even try it!’

Lyle forgets that there is a world outside of him. He thinks that I am just revolving around him, but I am actually spinning in my own orbit and it just happens to revolve around him because he is there. I have always let him play the sports that he wants to, because he is an active guy, and I have never been the person saying, ‘no, I don’t want you to go there’. He has his life, and our life together, and I would be that way with any guy, that is just my personality.

I have responsibilities outside of ensuring that Lyle has whatever he needs at the time. He will accept an invitation on our behalf, but if it is just for the two of us, he forgets that behind that I have to find someone to babysit our son. It cannot always be my family, because they will eventually get sick of it. And what if something else is happening that night? All of these things scramble around behind for us to go out for dinner, and he forgets that, he says, ‘I’m here for dinner!’ Meanwhile, it is two hours of activity to make it happen. It is like he is a performer, and everyone else makes the stage work out the way he wants. It has always been like that with
us. That is our relationship, although he would be horrified that I said that! [Laughs]

*On talking with Lyle after the interview:*

When I went home and spoke with Lyle after our meeting, we had a good talk about stress and coping. He said that he uses physical activity, so all of the sports that he plays, as his outlet. He looks forward to that, and he will play with anyone if he has the chance, so it is not necessarily the camaraderie thing, but more of the exertion, the release. His involvement in sports has increased over the years so it might be safe to assume that as his stress level has increased over the years, so has his need for more physical release.

In talking with Lyle that night, I also realized why I felt I was having a hard time answering the “cope” question. I consistently had a hard time thinking of specific situations. To me, “cope” is a weak word; it infers weakness, it says that a person is barely getting by. I visualize someone crawling up a mountain, out of breath and barely making it, as opposed to someone walking up that mountain, tired but persevering without stopping – *that* is Lyle. Lyle is not a weak person, so I had a hard time picturing him “coping” with anything! He has always been a strong individual; he is comfortable with himself as both a person and a police officer. As a supervisor now, he may not be first on scene to a horrific car crash or be the person doing a next-of-kin notification, but over his career he has had his fair share of horrible days and has seen and heard some terrible things. I would have an incredibly difficult time dealing with those things, especially over and over again. I forget sometimes that he is human and of course would be affected by what he hears and sees every day.

*On her hopes and dreams for the future with Lyle, and their family:*

I just want us to be happy and healthy and raise a kind, happy and healthy little boy who is successful in his life, too.
Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:

Some of the things your police spouse needs to talk about are terrible but you have to be strong enough to listen. There are things they can talk about and sometimes you might be the only person they feel they can show their “weakness” to. Encourage them to attend debriefings, even if they do not think a file has affected them or if they are uncomfortable with the idea of sitting with their peers and talking about what happened. Their presence may help the other officers and in time, they may feel comfortable speaking out. Even if they never say a thing, it might help them to know they are not the only person who felt or thought the way they did.

Morbid humour – get used to it. Some people laugh at funerals and we do not hate them for it. Everyone has a way of expressing themselves and it is not intended to be disrespectful or callous.

Finally, there are very few places in this world that a police officer can go and really not expect to have to be a police officer, like Costa Rica. Try to go there…. a lot.

Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for the police organization:

Acknowledge that policing is not just a job; it is a way of life. The police member and their families’ lives are affected everyday by the service, and the member is expected to be a police officer when they are on duty and off. Officers are judged both publicly and privately as to who they spend time with and how they spend their time. Support your members publicly – stand up for the people who are acting on your behalf and remember that their friends and families are also affected by what you say and/or do in the name of the organization. We all forget sometimes that police officers are human.
Michelle’s story

Background

Michelle, 44, and James, 48, met in their late teens when they worked together at a fast-food restaurant. They have been together as a couple for 28 years, and married for 27. James was an auxiliary police member when they were dating, and has been serving as a full-time sworn member for 26 years. Currently, he is a sergeant within a municipal police department. Michelle works full-time as a manager within the financial industry. The couple has two adult sons.

On establishing themselves as a couple (dating, getting married, moving in, having kids, etc.):

We were both quite young, and we dated for a year before we got married. We got married, and then moved in together to our first apartment. I had just graduated from high school, and James had been working for a couple of years. At that time, he had been training, knowing that he wanted to be a police officer. He was already in the reserve program, and working full time. The next year, James was at the police academy, and our son was born. So we had a small baby at home and he was off at the JI, which was really hard. They had to live in residence at that time, so he would only come home on weekends. He was there full-time for two years. After they finished their first couple of years, then they would just go back for blocks at a time.

James was in his last block of training at the JI when our second son was born. So both times, we had these brand new babies, and he was not around! That was a challenge, but he was always very gung-ho. It was a challenge to have him go to shiftwork, which he had never done before. He had always been working days, so it was a change to incorporate that into our lives. When we had little kids at home, he was sleeping during the day.
As the boys got a little bit older, James was able to move into a position as the school liaison officer. By then, the boys were both in school full time, which worked out great. James has always been a really super-committed dad, coaching their hockey teams and things. One of the reasons he took that position was so that he was available after school, and he was not working evenings or weekends as much. It freed up time for him to be involved in all their activities. He did that for a few years, and then moved into the bike patrol. He did a few positions like that where he was the first guy in the division to get them up and running.

*On James’ career in policing, and adjusting to the lifestyle of having a partner who is an officer:*

We worked together for a couple of years before we started dating, and he said, ‘this is what I am going to do’. He was working as a manager at the time, but it was like, ‘this is where I am putting in my time while I am studying and doing all these other things to make sure I pass my exam’. It was always a foregone conclusion. James’ dad was a police officer, and his grandpa was a police officer. He grew up in the policing background, and his dad was in the RCMP. At that time, you could not be stationed in your home province. It does not make sense if people are happier when they are closer to their families, and it is expensive! They used to move them around all the time, so James lived in lots of different and remote places, and I know it was hard for him. His mom always says, ‘it’s what we had to do, so that’s what we did!’ She is a strong lady, and she is not a complainer, but I cannot imagine how hard that would have been to leave her friends and family for a new place, then another one, and another one.

It is so important to have that social support. James knew that while he wanted to be in policing, he did not want us to be in a situation where we would do what they had to do all the time. He said, ‘I saw how hard that was for my mom. I want my kids to be able to be in one place.’ So it was never a question when he was looking at his career. He wanted to be with a
municipal department, that was his goal, and he did not want to be somewhere where he
would be transferred. I have always been really appreciative of that. We wanted our kids to
have a different experience, so they have always gone to the same schools, and have had their
core group of friends. That was really important for us, and it was a conscious decision that we
made. James was very firm on that from the outset of his career.

I remember we went to the session for new officers and their spouses, and they said there
is this “super-cop” phase that they go through, which is totally what it is! James was just super
excited to go to work every day, and it was like he was thinking, ‘I’m going to rid the world of
crime!’ After that, it moved into a balance in that James got past that super-cop thing, and he
was moving ahead and trying to work towards promotions.

I think in that phase of his career, I saw him get a little bit frustrated and disillusioned,
because everybody has the same kind of personality, and they are all trying to apply for that
promotion and get ahead. James then went into major crime, which was hard, only because
again, it was not regular hours. Bad crimes often happen overnight and on the weekends! He
was getting called out all the time, and even when he was off, he was never really off, he was
always on-call. Stress-wise, I saw that take a big toll on him, because he was always working, he
never got any downtime. At the same time, he did enjoy the work. He really likes seeking out,
digging, and getting to the bottom of things, so that was a good spot for him to be. He did get
frustrated though with having to be so particular with every little thing to make sure that things
could progress properly and move to trial, and they could get convictions. It is really a slow
process, and I think he felt that he was never really making any headway, because he could never
get anything off his desk! They do this much on this thing, then they have to go back and they
are working all these cases at the same time. Then the phone was ringing all the time in the
middle of the night. At first you think, ‘ah! Something is going on! What’s happening?’ After awhile, it is more like, ‘what? What now? Just a minute, he’s right here.’ That was a really stressful time, it was hard for both of us, and it interrupted a lot of family time. When he was able to move back out of that, it was really great.

Within the last couple of years, James was back on patrol, which was hard at that point in his career, because he was then probably about 40. Having to go back to work shiftwork was tough, and it was a big adjustment for us to do that again. They tend to move them around. In major crime, they have a tenure of five years. I said to him, if you were comparing it to what we do at my work, you move someone up to be a manager, and now you are saying, ‘okay, great! You’re doing that really well. You can go back and work on the frontline now. Thanks for learning that and doing all that work!’ [Laughs] I can see how you want to have opportunities for people to try and get those experiences, but it takes a lot of time and effort and investment in an employee. They take courses and it is a really specialized thing, so why would you not want to keep someone in that role? I think he is a bit frustrated by that, because he really did like it. Once he moved out of it though, I think he realized how stressful it is.

James does not have to work shiftwork anymore, which is really nice. Now, he is managing a team of people, which has its own stresses! [Laughs] Some days, he is pulling out his hair, but at the same time, he is really enjoying it. It is just a different type of police work.

He has had lots of different experiences, working in schools, bike, regular patrol, and major crime, which, without a doubt, was probably the most stressful thing. In that section, he had to deal with sexual assaults, some of which were children, which I think was really hard, and he had to be on site for murder scenes and things like that. He has been really good over the years at not bringing work home. He does not share a lot of stuff, because he knows I have a
sensitive nature, and I find that hard to deal with. There were times that I would notice; I could just tell that he was carrying a heavy burden, and then I would wonder myself, ‘how do you guys deal with this on a day-to-day basis?’ Often, his feedback is, ‘well, there is counselling there, but nobody will go because then you’re branded as a sissy.’ There is a stigma attached to it still, there really is. So, they end up eating a lot of that, which I think shows in its own health ways.

On the perceived impact of James’ career on their marriage and family:

Is there an impact? Yes and no. I think we were really fortunate. When we were married less than ten years, we met a couple that became really good mentors for us. We met them at church, and he really helped James to see, as a man, this is what you need to be a good role model for your family; this is how to be a good husband and a good father. I think back on that now, and I think that was really important, because of the type of person that policing attracts. They are used to the idea that ‘these are the rules, it is black and white, there is no grey, and this is the way things are going to be done’. They are used to people complying, so if you are told to do something, you are going to do it! To come away from a work environment and to try and have more balance at home, I can see why a lot of guys struggle with that. I think James has that outside balance, where it is not all about everybody towing the line and complying. Do not get me wrong though, that is still at the core! I think you have to come at your family with a little bit more balance, and be a good role model. Be someone that they look up to, and not necessarily be someone that is always laying down the law with them. I know that is something that he has consciously struggled with over the years. It has been a bit more challenging as our kids have gotten older, where he is still inclined to want to tell them what to do. They are grown men, and you need to move past that, of trying to tell them what to do, and hope that maybe they will come to you and ask you for advice. That is still a struggle, because they are just in their
early twenties. I have found it has been hardest for him to move from them being teenagers into this young adult phase. The kids will come to me, and I say, ‘well, why don’t you ask him?’ They say, ‘well, I can’t talk to him, he’ll just say no!’ So they get that kind of dad reaction, but they will all work it out.

We have been really family-focused; it is something that we have always worked on. We are focused on our kids, and I have always grown up in a family that went to church. James’ family never did, so when our kids got to that age where they could start going to Sunday school, he was onboard with exposing them to that. James became a Christian, which I think really helped to balance out his attitude; well, it helped to give him some perspective outside of the job and provide some balance. I think that has been probably the biggest thing. If I look back on it now, maybe in our early marriage it did have an impact. We were also very young, I was 18 when we got married, and he was only 21. I look at the ages of my kids now, and think, oh my gosh! My youngest, I was his age when he was born! By that point in our relationship, we had already built a house and we had two kids. Here he is still off at university, which is a good place for him to be!

When I went back to work and started my own career, I think that was important too. It was good, and I was ready to do that. I can see looking back, that maybe if I had not done that, it would have been easier to be overwhelmed. To have my own identity as well that was not totally tied into what he was doing, I think was really important. Our youngest was two or three, so I only went back to work part-time, but I had been at home by that time for six years, being a full-time mom. It was good to get that foot in the door and get out of the house, talk to grown-ups, and not to be just whole house-centered. It brings its own stresses because you still want to make sure those things are done, I am just that type of a person where I have to have everything
neatly organized. I still want to make sure that the home is taken care of. Luckily, at that time James was in school, so he was not working shiftwork as much, and it made it a little bit easier.

While James was back on patrol for two years, he contracted a strep infection from a prisoner, and ended up being really sick for a year. When he was able to come back to work, he was not able to go back to patrol. He tried to work shiftwork, and his doctor finally said, ‘your body can’t take this kind of additional stress’. James was able to move into the office position that he is in now, so that was good. What James had, usually only about 30 percent survive from, so he was a pretty lucky guy. For him to be still with us is great, and he just needs to watch that he does not get himself overly rundown. The fact that he is not on the road is a good thing. He only has to work four days a week, so he works Tuesday to Friday. Even having that extra day when he is not taxing himself is really good. Often now, he will catch anything that goes around. I have also noticed that he coughs all the time, and he gets tired easily. That is one of the reasons he went into this other role where he is not working nights, because he just could not recover. He was getting run down, and right away, he was getting sick.

He has never really been 100 percent since that happened, he is nowhere near as healthy as he was before, and I do not think he ever will be. It was about three years ago now, and he was off for a full year from it. The strep infection went through his chest so it affected his lungs. I think he probably has some permanent lung damage in some areas from the surgeries that he had to have. It was pretty bad!

At the time, our youngest was living at university, and he has a really close group of friends. The team is together all the time, and that was really big for him. I know they were praying for him a lot, and he had that constant support, which was really great. Our older one had a tougher time, because he and his wife had split up just before that. He had an 18 month-
old baby to look after, his wife had left, and his dad was super sick in the hospital. He was basically the only one at home, because I was living at the hospital. He was taking care of things, so he had a lot on his plate, and that was really hard. The boys could not go and see James at the hospital, because it was too much. I think that hurt James, because they are very close, but they just could not see their dad that way. I get why they could not do it, but on the other hand, he really missed them being there. It was an incredibly stressful time for our family.

The day-to-day… I look back and I think, ‘ugh, my god, how did I do that?’ My mom came out for a week and she took care of the home front. She said, ‘there is no clean laundry!’ That one week she was there was the only time that we had a home-cooked meal. Then she went home, and James was in intensive care for six weeks, and I did not eat another meal until he came home from the hospital! I was just eating at the hospital, and the food there is not that bad when that is all there is to eat! Everyone at my office was really supportive, and it helped me to still come to work everyday. It was probably not the smartest thing to do, but you just do what you can do to get through it.

*On describing how she feels when James discusses stressful events experienced on-the-job:*

It is easier for him to talk about it now because his stress is more day-to-day stress. We are in the same type of environment, where we are both working in an office, so I think he finds it is easier to relate, like, ‘I had to deal with this staffing issue’, and to just come home and vent a little bit, and get it off his chest. Sometimes he looks for some feedback, which is great. In the past, I have always just let him have his space, and I know that eventually he will come around to it. I can see it eating at him for a little while, and then I say, ‘what’s going on?’ Sometimes it has been a specific thing or sometimes it has been an ongoing issue with somebody else he has been working with, but by then, he is usually ready to talk about it a little bit more.
Describing her observations of James’ coping strategies for operational stress:

James has always been very involved in the community. He has always coached, and I think that has been a good outlet for him. The whole time, when our kids were growing up, he always coached one of their hockey teams, which in itself is very time-consuming. I think he really enjoys that, and I think it helps get his mind off of whatever stress he is working on. We are very focused on our kids; we have never missed a game. Our son is now playing at university, and that is still a priority. We get to all the kids’ games, and I think that is a big stress reliever for James. Even now that our kids are not playing hockey, he still coaches, and he has done that for the last five or six years, he coaches 12 year-old boys. So I wonder now, is this causing you less stress or more? [Laughs] It is not usually the kids, but the parents! I think that distracts him from the work, and he really does love it. So he does that, and he runs coaching clinics. I think the hockey outlet has been huge for him; it is a totally different focus. He knows when he is at the rink, he has to be focused when he is working with sixteen 12 year-olds! He cannot help but be in the moment when he is working with them, so I think that helps a lot. James is also consistent with working out, and I think that really makes a difference. He makes time every day to go the gym, so that helps too.

We have a granddaughter; she is almost five, and she just has grandpa wrapped around her little finger. It is quite interesting to see a dynamic that I have never seen with our boys. With her, it is totally the opposite; she is definitely the top priority in his world. Last week, he said, ‘I’m taking a half day off so I can pick her up from daycare and I am going to take her skiing and we’re going to do this, this, and this.’ He is really involved with her, and loves to spend time with her, so that is really great.

We have always had good communication, which is great. Sometimes, James would
come home and say, ‘this promotional competition is coming up’. At that time, he had to write an exam, and then he was ranked on it, which was followed by interviews, so it all factored in. Then the department would make a list, which would be in effect for two years. So they would just go down the list, and for the next position, the next guy would be promoted. What he found at that time was management was not making decisions fast enough, so there would be vacant positions, but they would not be promoting guys off the list, and then the list would expire. So he would have to start it all again! They would not carry it forward, and now they do. So they did change that, but he used to find that incredibly frustrating. It was this long, protracted process, and you would just be waiting, and it would never happen! That was hard, and it was hard to see him be that frustrated. Knowing what type of person James is, and knowing that he would be a good supervisor, and not to get that opportunity to do it was always really frustrating.

James shows stress in different ways. It carried over from the beginning of his career, and I would notice certain things. I knew he was really stressed out when he would grind his teeth in the middle of the night, or he would be a restless sleeper. So I could always tell at different times, at work when there were things that were bothering him, even though he would not tell me about them, I could tell. He would be grinding or he would sometimes even, not talk in his sleep, but make these noises, and I could tell he was dreaming about something. He has also had colitis since he was a teenager, so there would be times too that that would flare up and that would tie in with what was going on, so that is stress-related. There are times where it is definitely worse, but he controls it pretty well now with medication. He also gets a little bit quieter, or a little bit more edgy. When he was working shiftwork, it was hard to differentiate between just being tired and cranky, or being stressed out! [Laughs] It was usually those types of things. He did not usually talk about it, but I would say, ‘I noticed that something has been
bugging you’. So he would come and say, ‘well, this and this happened’ without giving me all of the grisly details.

Just talking to me in the little bit that James does is probably not enough. I think it would be good to get that off his chest. He deals with that in his own way by focusing his attention in other areas, whether avoidance is the best technique to get over that kind of stuff, I do not know. It seems to have worked, but I think it has manifested itself in other ways, affecting his health and things like that.

It makes me worry, and I have encouraged him over the years to go and talk to somebody. I say, ‘I know you don’t want to burden me with all of the things that have been happening, but it would be good for you just to go and get that off your chest’. He has never taken up on that, which is too bad. I know that they did have a group debrief after one incident, and I think that helped. Sometimes, I know that he chats with the guys at work and that kind of helps. There have been a couple of times where there have been extremely traumatic things that have happened, and they have counsellors come on-site and talk to them, that has been more recent. When he first started, I do not think it was as much of a concern. But then, they did not have the same kind of violent crimes that we have seen in the last five or ten years.

A friend of ours went out with James one night on a ride-along. He phoned me the next day and said, ‘oh my goodness, your husband is the most patient, calm person! I would have lost it twenty times over last night!’ [Laughs] You cannot do that; you have to deal with these people who are just being total jerks to you, constantly, and be calm and not get upset. Even though you are wearing a gun, you cannot pull it all the time! [Laughs] James says that is just way too much paperwork! [Laughs] Plus they are so under so much scrutiny now. I have never wanted to do a ride-along; I do not need to see the mean streets, not at all! [Laughs] Some of it
is dangerous, and I do not want to be in the middle of that. I am okay watching it on TV, and that is enough reality for me!

James has always been really good about not bringing work home. For the boys, it has just been like, this is just what dad does. When he was working in the schools, he was there all the time. He would be there in uniform, so it was never like they were not used to seeing him in his uniform. He would be at the school with his police car, and he always tried to make it a really interactive thing too with everyone. He would go into the different classrooms, and because their school was in his catchment, he was there quite often. It was never an intimidation thing, he would say, ‘…and here’s the lights and the sirens!’ He wanted to make that a leaping off point, so that if you leave a positive impression, when they get into high school, hopefully you have kids coming to you, rather than running away when things are going on.

Since James always coached, there would be times where he would show up for a game on the bench in his uniform! [Laughs] I always thought that was really great, then it was not just our own boys, but the other boys that he was working with that could see that it was okay to be a police officer. It is as cool as being a fireman! [Laughs] Our oldest recently mentioned policing, and said that maybe it would be neat to be an officer. I know he has had conversations with his dad about it. It takes a specific personality, and I think our youngest is a little bit too sensitive. Our oldest is totally the opposite; he has got a bit more of a quick temper! James told him he could arrange for a ride-along, and he would go with someone else. I thought that would be good for him to see.

On coping individually with stress, and information shared by James about the job:

James has been really good at not sharing a lot of gruesome details with me over the years; he tries to protect me from that. There have been a couple of things that have come out,
maybe a year after it has happened. I say, ‘why didn’t you tell me about that?’ But I know why he did not! When he gets to that point of being able to talk, I just let him vent and try to be supportive when he tells me those things. I have a good network of people that I have worked with for the last 20 years. My family all lives locally too, so my sister is only a phone call away. I can call her and say, ‘ah! This happened today!’ She is always a good sounding board for that.

James is so careful in sharing. He has told me a couple of hard things, and I just feel really empathetic and I say, ‘that must have been really hard for you to see, because I can only imagine what that must have been like to have been there to see that.’ I think he appreciates that. The only time that I have ever really worried about him at work is when he worked on the [name of specialized team] for two years. That was the only time in his career that I was stressed out, because you knew by the time that phone call came, it was bad!

People say, ‘don’t you worry? I would be worried all the time!’ I say, ‘no!’ And they would probably not be, because you cannot live like that, it becomes your norm. Maybe I compartmentalize it, but I do not worry about him on a day-to-day basis. It is always what he has done and I know that he is not purposely putting himself in harm’s way, at least I hope not. I know that he is careful.

If there were ever times that I was upset, I would give my mom a ring and say, ‘this is what’s going on’ and we would have a chat, or she would say, ‘do you want me to come over?’ My family has always been good with that. All of us are really close, so it is nice.

When James was in the hospital, I remember saying to one of my co-workers at the time that I now know why people go off on stress leave. That being said, I just focused on one day at a time. I tend to be very compartmentalized to my "moment". When I am at work, I am focused on what I am doing and do not think too much about the home front; the same goes for
when I am at home. Because it was a prolonged illness and James was in the hospital for such a long time, leaving work everyday and driving to the hospital just became the new normal. I was very conscious about making sure that I ate, exercised, and slept every day so that I did not get too run down. The "super stress diet" helped me drop 10 pounds though, probably because the only home cooked meal we ate that whole time was when my mom stayed with us the first week. Generally, I am a very calm and common sense person, so I tried not to think in worst-case scenarios and fret about possible dire outcomes. Unlike my mother-in-law, who felt compelled to phone me daily and share these stories with me...I had actually forgotten about that until now. I know she was worried, but this added such another layer of stress to me that I started screening her calls. Looking back, I am not sure how I was able to function at work, liaise with all the doctors, nurse him at the hospital - they really do not have enough staff to go around - field calls from friends and family and also help James stay on an even keel. You just do what you need to do, have a couple of cries along the way and carry on.

On strategies for coping with stress as a couple, and whether these have changed over time:

Has it changed over time? I would say so. I know we made a real effort to have a date night when our kids were super busy, where it was our time, and we could sit down and have a real conversation with each other that did not revolve around hockey schedules and homework! That can be hard to do, but we always try. As our kids have gotten older, we have really made time to take trips, so we have done a lot of travelling over the last few years. You cannot help but have that time together when you are away from all the day-to-day; it is way easier to have those good conversations with each other. So we try to do that a couple of times a year, whether it is a weekend or an extended holiday where we can get away for a couple of weeks. We have hit a lot of spots! It is just the two of us, although we broke that rule last year when we took my
son and his daughter with us. Even still, that was nice, and when you are away from your routine, it is so relaxing. We could still find time together and leave them to their devices. It is important to carve out that time. You have to make that effort, where you can just go and connect and have a good conversation.

Sometimes, I will call James out. I will let him know, ‘it has been a couple of days and I can tell that something is bothering you’. He tends to be pretty even-tempered so those times are pretty few and far between when he gets a little bit short. We have always had an unspoken rule where only one person is crazy at a time! [Laughs] We say, ‘okay, both of us are not allowed to be totally over-emotional at the same time!’ That is something that has just naturally evolved over the years, all through our marriage. If someone is upset, the other person tends to be super calm, and says, ‘okay, I will let you work on that, and when you are feeling more like yourself, come back and talk to me!’ That has always worked well; we have never had a real butting of heads where everybody is screaming at each other, so I think that has helped a lot. He knows that he can have that space for a couple of days, then I say, ‘okay, you have been pretty cranky. What is going on?’ I can see it crest, so it is just a sense of knowing when he is ready to talk about it. Until then, I take a bit of a wide berth and carry on! [Laughs] It is usually not protracted. After a couple of days, we talk and he says, ‘oh, I thought you were mad at me!’ I am like, ‘really? Well, let’s think about what has happened over the last couple of days.’ [Laughs] So we will have a laugh about it and then carry on.

Over the years, our friends evolved out of the parents that we have met through the kids’ activities. When our kids were playing hockey eight times a week, [laughs] we were seeing those people every day! So that is where our friends came from. We still have a group of friends that we knew from before we got married and we have kept in touch with them over the
years, and still see them quite regularly.

We have never really hung out with a lot of other police families. Partly because we have never been drinkers, and we have always found that in the past, any police function that we went to seemed to involve a lot of excessive alcohol. I know for some people, that is their coping mechanism, and James does not enjoy that, he has never been interested in that. So he does not find it enjoyable at all when we do not drink and we are going to events where other people are out of control. I have always found it funny that James has separated himself from what is going on in his office, all that partying or whatever. In some ways, I find it hard because I know those people have some things in common with us, so it might have been nice over the years to connect more with them, but I get why he does not want to do that.

We still go to retirement functions and see people that are still with the department that James has partnered with over the years. We became a little bit better friends with them, and we used to see them more regularly when our kids were younger. It gets really hard to make that time when the kids get into their teens, so we do not see them as much anymore.

**On hopes and dreams for the future as a couple:**

It will be interesting. James is getting close to the end of his career. Since he started when he was so young, he can retire in four years. We keep laughing saying now the tables have turned, and he can be a stay-at-home dad and househusband for awhile. He looks at that as an opportunity maybe to move into something else. I know that he would probably like to be more involved with hockey, since it is such a passion for him. Maybe he would do something along those lines, but I think he is ready to be finished policing, he is looking forward to that. He has really enjoyed it, but I think he is done! [Laughs] It is almost getting to the point where he is counting the days. James said, ‘I could retire in two years!’ I said, ‘well, that is not going to
happen, our son is still in university, sorry! Next!’ But if he can retire and he wants to be home, that is great. Then he can fill in his time doing consulting or whatever he wants to do.

I would like to say that we have a five-year plan, hopefully, where we can both not be working, or at least where I do not have to work so much. It still depends a lot on our kids. Our oldest is still living at home, there is still an obligation there, and we have got to get this other kid out of school!

*Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for other police couples:*

Setting aside that time for each other is really important, and having good communication, even if you have to wait a couple of days to have it. Let them have their own space, but have yours too. I think just in general, it is important not to be totally dependent on another person. You have to be able to be your own person and stand up; otherwise, given their personalities, I think that could be damaging. I do not want to say it is bullying, but as I mentioned, they are used to things being done their way, so you have to stand up for yourself. I say to James, ‘we’re not doing that this way this time. What if we did this instead?’ That has taken us time to come around to too. Being able to find the compromise on both sides is important, and again, it just comes back to the communication thing.

It is not always going to be your way, but sometimes it can be your way. He will choke down, ‘it is always my fault’, and he learned how to say ‘I am sorry’, even if he did not do anything wrong! [Laughs] And ‘a happy wife is a happy life’. It has become a bit of a joke, but I think it is a bit more accepted now, and it is true, that guys have learned how to compromise too over the years. So it is not all of this stuff about, ‘that’s your job, you’re going to get that done’. Well actually, I draw the line at garbage. Garbage is his job! [Laughs] That has evolved over the years too for us. I know that was hard for him, because he grew up in a household
where it was the opposite – his mom did everything. It was probably more of a traditional police family where his mom did not really work. She stayed at home, while his dad’s law was the way it was done. James is a better wife than I am! When he was working shiftwork, he was home more often than I was, and he is way better at making sure the laundry is done and all that stuff. He does a lot, probably more than I do, and he is totally okay with that. What needs to be done needs to be done.

Getting that group of people that are outside of policing is important. Having a mentor or someone that is outside of your work too, I know that was really crucial for us. I wonder if we had not met them at that time in our lives, if things might have turned out differently. It really helped James to see the balance in life, and how his family should be treated. Not that he was off the rails before that, but it gave him a different perspective.

*Thoughts, suggestions, or recommendations for the police organization on operational stress:*

I would like to see them be able to offer something – I am sure they do. I just do not know how they can get to that point where the guys feel like they can phone, and it would not be fodder for everyone in the office. It probably is not, but I think that is the perception. At my work, they offer us a counselling service where you can phone in to a 1-800 number from home or wherever if you need to talk to somebody. I do not know if they are offered the same type of thing. James has never been specific about that. He says, ‘yeah, there is somebody that I can go talk to’. I wonder if that is in the office, or if it is off-site, I do not really know. So to somehow get over that stigma and say, ‘it is okay, if you need to talk to somebody, these are the options’. There are things that I know James has dealt with, and those that involve kids are always the hardest. There have been some really traumatic things that I know that he has just internally coped with, but I think, ‘you do not have to do that, and nobody expects that’. I do not know if
they build that into their training now at the JI, or if that is just brushed over, because maybe it is too “foo-foo”. But it is important, and he has seen guys that he has worked with over the years who became burnt out with some really serious posttraumatic stress, that they have had to, or have not been able to, get over. It is hard to see people that we have known suffer through that. Some of them are career ending, and I think that is really sad. Could something have been done before that to help them deal with it?
Appendix B: Interview protocol

“Operational Stress and the Police Marriage: A Narrative Study of Police Spouses”

Interview Protocol

Demographic Survey Questions:

1. What is/was the duration of your relationship with your marital partner? How long have you been together with your partner as a couple (since first meeting)?

2. What is the status of your marital relationship with your partner? (e.g. first or second marriage, separated, divorced)

3. Were the two of you married before or after your partner became a police officer?

4. What is your age?

5. What is the age of your partner?

6. What is your current employment status? If working outside of the home, what is the nature of your work?

7. Do you have any children with your partner? If so, how many, and approximate age(s)?

8. How long has your partner been serving as a police officer, and what is his or her rank?

9. Is your partner serving as a member of a municipal police service, or the RCMP?

Life Story Interview – Guiding Questions:

1. Can you describe the stages of your relationship with your partner?
   a. How did the two of you first meet?
   b. How did your partner describe their work as a police officer to you?/ Express an interest in pursuing a career in policing?
   c. Can you describe the process of establishing yourselves as a couple and settling in together? E.g. Life with friends, getting engaged, moving in together, getting married, having kids, etc.

2. Do you perceive your partner’s career in policing as having an impact on your marriage? If so, how? If not, can you elaborate?

3. Can you describe how you feel when your partner discusses with you stressful events that they experience while on-the-job?

4. How do you cope individually with this information that is shared by your partner?
5. Can you identify the coping strategies that you perceive your partner to use to deal with the stress they experience on-the-job?

6. Have your partner’s coping strategies for work-related stress had an impact on you? If yes, how so?

7. How have you learned to cope as a couple with the stress that you experience in your relationship? Have these strategies changed over the course of your partner’s career?
   - Can you identify the specific strategies that the two of you use as a couple?

8. What suggestions or recommendations might you have, or advice, for other police couples? (What would you like them to know?)
   - And to the police organization regarding stress in the workplace?
Appendix C: Letter of invitation to participants

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 18, 2011

Dear Prospective Participant,

We are writing to offer you the opportunity to participate in a research project entitled “Operational Stress and the Police Marriage: A Narrative Study of Police Spouses”. You have received this letter because you were identified by another as someone who may be interested, or you may know someone else who may be interested in participating in this research project.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived impact of operational stress in policing on the marital relationship, from the perspectives of officers’ civilian spouses. We hope to allow your story to be told, and to gain the knowledge required to assist in the development of new resources to enhance social support and resilience for police families.

For the purpose of this study, we are recruiting approximately ten individuals who meet all of the following criteria:
1. Participants must be married to, or have previously been married to an RCMP or municipal police service member for at least one year
2. The police member must be a full-time, active-duty, sworn service member at the commencement of the study
3. The police member must have identified their spouse as having at least one experience of operational stress while on the job
4. The spouse must never have been a police member themselves.

Fluency in English is required to participate in this research project.

Participants will be asked to participate in a two-hour individual interview, and two one-hour follow-up interviews within two to seven months later. The total time commitment is a maximum of approximately four hours in three interview sessions, over a period of approximately seven months. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The only individuals who will have access to the recordings and transcripts will be the Principal Investigator, Dr. Marla Buchanan, and the Co-Investigator, Alanna Thompson. We will maintain your confidentiality by establishing with you a pseudonym to be used instead of your real name in all written material associated with this research project. All identifying information will also be removed from transcriptions and not appear in any final documentation or reports. All data associated with this project will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, within a locked office at the University of British Columbia. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to review the narrative summaries of your interviews and add any information, or remove any information that you do not wish to have included. Participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence.

April 18, 2011
This research is being conducted as part of Alanna Thompson’s graduate thesis project in the Counseling Psychology Master of Arts Program at the University of British Columbia. The results of this research will be included in a masters thesis that will become a public document in the University library once completed. The results of this research may also be published in appropriate professional and academic journals, presented at upcoming professional conferences, and shared with any interested parties such as municipal police agencies, the Justice Institute of British Columbia, and the RCMP.

All participants will be provided with an honorarium of $20 to reimburse any costs associated with transportation, parking, and mileage.

If you decide to participate in this study, or would like more information, please contact Alanna Thompson at 604- or by email: Dr. Marla Buchanan can be reached at the University of British Columbia by calling 604-822-4625 or via email at marla.buchanan@ubc.ca.

Thank you in advance for your time and interest.

Regards,

Alanna Thompson, M.A.cand. Dr. Marla Buchanan

April 18, 2011
Appendix D: Participant consent form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology,
and Special Education
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: 604-822-0342
Fax: 604-822-3302
Web: www.ecps.ubc.ca

CONSENT FORM

"Operational Stress and the Police Marriage: A Narrative Study of Police Spouses"

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marc Buchanan, Associate Professor
University of British Columbia
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education
604-822-6225

Co-Investigator: Alanna Thompson, Graduate Student
University of British Columbia
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education
604-

This research is being conducted as part of Alanna Thompson’s graduate thesis project in the Counselling Psychology Master of Arts Program at the University of British Columbia. The results of this research will be included in a masters thesis that will become a public document in the University library once completed. The results of this research may also be published in appropriate professional and academic journals, presented at upcoming professional conferences, and shared with any interested parties such as municipal police agencies, the Justice Institute of British Columbia, and the RCMP.

Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the perceived impact of operational stress in policing on the marital relationship, from the perspectives of officers’ civilian spouses. We hope to allow your story to be told, and to gain the knowledge required to assist in the development of new resources to enhance social support and resilience for police families.

April 18, 2011

Counselling Psychology • Human Development, Learning and Culture
Measurement, Evaluation and Research Methodology • School Psychology • Special Education
Procedures

As a study participant, you will be asked to engage in a two-hour individual interview. In addition, you will be asked to participate in two brief follow-up interviews of approximately one hour each, in order to gain feedback. The first interview will include a brief demographic survey, followed by your participation in what is called a ‘Life Story’ interview. You will be asked to reflect on your life with your spouse, and describe your relationship at different stages, from first meeting them through to the present, and your expectations for the future with your partner. These interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and a descriptive narrative summary written from the original transcriptions. You will be provided with two opportunities in the follow-up interviews to review your transcript, check for the accuracy and meaning of your story, add information to the summary or remove information that you do not wish to have included. At the final follow-up interview, the overall results of the study will be discussed. A final draft of the research study will also be available to you once the project is completed.

Time Commitment

Your commitment to the research study will involve a total of approximately four hours within a two to seven month period.

Confidentiality

Any information identifying individuals participating in this study will be kept confidential. Only the principal investigator, Dr. Marta Buchanan and co-investigator, Alanna Thompson will have access to the interview transcripts and audio recordings. Interviews will be conducted by Alanna Thompson. To maintain your confidentiality, she will establish with you a pseudonym to be used instead of your real name in all written material associated with the project. All identifying information will also be removed from transcriptions and will not appear in any final documentation or reports. All data associated with this project will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, within a locked office at the University of British Columbia. Computer data files will be password protected.

April 18, 2011
Limits of Confidentiality

We are committed to respecting your privacy, which includes the maintenance of confidentiality; however, the confidentiality of the information that you provide is not absolute. There are circumstances that limit confidentiality. In these circumstances it is our duty to disclose participant information. There are two specific ways in which such a duty may arise:

1. You disclose an intention to harm yourself or someone else. The researchers are required by law to do anything they can to reasonably prevent this from happening.

2. You disclose information, previously unreported, regarding the abuse of a child. The researchers are required by law to report suspected or potential child abuse or neglect to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, or the police.

Compensation

You will receive an honorarium of $20 to reimburse for any transit, parking, and mileage costs associated with your participation in the study.

Contact for Information About the Study

If you have any questions or would like more information about this study, you may contact Dr. Marla Buchanan (Principal Investigator) at 604-822-4625 or Alanna Thompson (Co-investigator) at 604-

Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the LBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence.

April 18, 2011
Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above
Appendix E: List of resources for support

**Operational Stress and the Police Marriage: A Narrative Study of Police Spouses**

**Resources for Support:**

BC-wide Distress Line
1-800-784-2433
- Provides emotional support to individuals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

BC Psychological Association
www.psychologists.bc.ca
- Search listing of psychologists by area of expertise, availability, name, therapy method, location

Counselling BC
www.counsellingbc.com
- Directory of counsellors and psychologists within BC

Employee Assistance Program
- For information on how to access services, consult your partner, and/or contact the police department human resources or peer support team

**Suggested Reading:**

*Cops Don't Cry*
Author: Vali Stone (Canadian)

*Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement: A Guide for Officers and their Families*
Author: Kevin M. Gilmartin

*I Love a Cop: What Police Families Need to Know*
Author: Ellen Kirschman