

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**TRAUMA IN THE LINE OF DUTY:
AN EVALUATION OF THE USE OF DEBRIEFING IN THE
NEW ZEALAND POLICE**

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Psychology
At Massey University,
Palmerston North, New Zealand

NICOLA M. ADDIS

2002

Abstract

The effects of traumatic exposure on police officers are of increasing concern to the New Zealand Police. Effects can be of a physical, behavioural, or psychological nature, and in some circumstances, Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop. In March 1992, the New Zealand Police Trauma Policy was introduced to provide formalised debriefing to help reduce the development of traumatic stress symptoms. However, the effectiveness of debriefing in the mitigation of traumatic stress symptoms is a matter of contention. The primary aim of the present study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the New Zealand Police Trauma Policy in the mitigation of traumatic stress symptoms, including physical and psychological symptoms, and PTSD. Sixty-eight police officers, and their partners, involved in the deliberate slaying of a police officer were surveyed by questionnaire, approximately five years after the event. The results of regression analyses showed that debriefing was positively related to PTSD symptoms, and had no statistically significant influence on physical or psychological outcomes. These results support the findings of other controlled studies that suggest debriefing has no beneficial effect on mitigating symptoms of PTSD, and substantiate suggestions that debriefing may instead exacerbate symptoms. In addition, 78 % of the sample did not receive debriefing, despite its mandatory status for such events. It is concluded that the efficacy of debriefing is doubtful, and further evaluation research is needed.

Acknowledgements

My sincerest thanks must first go to the members of the New Zealand Police and their families who took the time to participate in this study. Your feedback has been eye-opening, I have such respect for you all.

To my supervisor, Dr Chris Stephens for her input, skill with statistics, professionalism and understanding, and to Jonathan Black of the New Zealand Police, for his tremendous time and effort, reliability and great sense of humour!

I would also like to thank Sharon. What timing we met! Awesome. Your friendship and experience has been invaluable. I am forever grateful.

Jan ... How much you have opened my eyes ... life is brilliant.

And to my darling Scott. What can I say? You're a truly wonderful person.

Finally, thank you Jan, Pete and Tom for putting up with me, again (I know you secretly enjoyed it!), and also Val and Tim, Linda and Neil, and Doug and Denise, for shedding a whole new perspective on life ...

“Life’s hard tasks are never sent for us to give up with. They are intended to awaken strengths, skills and courage in learning how to master them.”

Peter Maddison

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
List of Tables	v
List of Appendices	vi
The Policeman's Prayer	vii
<u>Introduction</u>	1
Traumatic Events	1
Traumatic Stress	2
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder	7
Post-traumatic Stress Intervention	10
Other Factors that can Influence Traumatic Stress Reactions	17
The Present Study	22
<u>Method</u>	24
Participants	24
The Measures	25
Procedure	30
The Slaying of a Police officer in the Course of Duty	32
<u>Results</u>	34
Analyses	34
Descriptive Findings	34
Preliminary Data Analysis	40
Research Question Analysis	41
Post-hoc Analysis	46

Discussion 50
 Summary of the Results 50
 Limitations of the Present Study 56
 Future Research 57
 Conclusion 61

References 62

List of Tables

<u>Table 1</u>	Trauma Policy Referrals	11
<u>Table 2</u>	Respondent Categories	24
<u>Table 3</u>	Summary of Gender, Age, Marital Status and Education	35
<u>Table 4</u>	Summary of Police Status and Length of Service	36
<u>Table 5</u>	Means, Standard Deviations and Range for IES-R, GHQ-12 and PILL	38
<u>Table 6</u>	Means, Standard Deviations and Range for Control Variables	39
<u>Table 7</u>	Simple Pearsons r Correlations Between IES-R, GHQ-12, PILL And Control Variables	42
<u>Table 8</u>	Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of IES Scores on Other Trauma, Respondent Status and Debriefing	43
<u>Table 9</u>	Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of PILL scores on Social Support, Other Trauma and Debriefing	45
<u>Table 10</u>	Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of IES Scores on Impact, Other Trauma, Respondent Status and Debriefing	46
<u>Table 11</u>	Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of PILL scores on Impact, Social Support, Other Trauma and Debriefing	48

List of Appendices

<u>Appendix A</u>	Diagnostic Criteria for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000)	82
<u>Appendix B</u>	The New Zealand Police Trauma Policy	86
<u>Appendix C</u>	An Evaluation of the New Zealand Police Trauma Policy: Questionnaire	114
<u>Appendix D</u>	Participant Information Sheet	128
<u>Appendix E</u>	Participant Follow-up Letter	132

A Policeman's Prayer

It is understood that among the effects of the late Constable P. C. Tulloch (1906 – 1941), there was found the following "Policeman's Prayer". That Constable Tulloch lived up to it is evidenced by the manner of his passing. He lost his life in the execution of his duty.

Give me the unfailing courage at all times and under all conditions. Let me look into the face of death with unblinking eyes and with no sense of fear. Teach me to realise that there are prowling human wolves ever ready to devour the innocent, that there are depraved creatures cast in comely human mould to who murder is but an incident, and crime in all its hideous phases only an occupation. Grant that I may live my life simply and keep my mind clean.

Let me acquire superlative the art of self-defence against the cunning wiles of mine own and the people's enemies. Steel me against the machinations of those who would corrupt me. May I never disgrace my uniform or think too lightly of those who, by long service and faithfulness to duty have earned the right to rank above me. Let me possess the virtues of the soldier on the battlefield. Preserve me from all personal vanity and save me from all pettiness in my dealings with those less fortunately placed in life.

Aid me in understanding that my job is a truly noble one; that it involves self-sacrifice, the maintenance of a robust body and a cool head, and that, first and last; I must be a man against men. Help me to be lightening quick in determining the right thing to do in grave emergencies. Help me to cultivate a warm heart and a ready hand for the needy and weak. May I be greatly feared by law-breakers and greatly loved by my friends.

Teach me to bear myself in storm or sunshine, in congenial or distasteful locations, always as the blue-cad symbol of civilisation's law, without which there would be little happiness on this earth and no reason whatsoever for human progress.