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## FACTORS FOR THRIVING IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

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FACTORS FOR THRIVING IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

By

KELLY K. WEDLEY

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the  
College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Education  
in Curriculum and Instruction

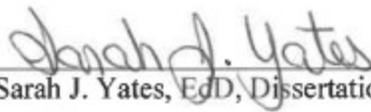
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Dissertation Approved:



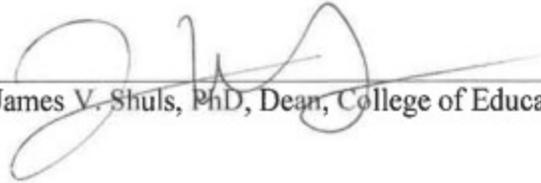
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## DEDICATION

I want to thank my family and especially my parents for always supporting me and emphasizing how important education is. You created and molded me, instilling a lifelong love of learning. A huge thank you to my husband for being there for me and embarking on his own journey at the same time. Keith I could not have done this on my own, I am so proud of you, and I love you. Finally, thank you, Lord, for the patience and strength.

“By perseverance the snail reached the ark.”

Charles Spurgeon

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## Abstract

The purpose of this non-experimental and quantitative study was to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. The sample for this study was convenient, non-probable, and purposive and comprised of 214 law enforcement officers from one large law enforcement agency in the State of Florida. The study's researcher-constructed survey instrument was determined to be internally consistent and reliable. A one sample *t*-test was used to assess the statistical significance of study participant mean score response to perceptions of thriving and the results were statistically significant. The use of between-subjects analytic techniques was used to compare the effect exerted by the demographic identifier variables upon perceptions of thriving to show there was no statistically significant difference between gender, current job assignment, years of service, and education level. Multiple linear regression (MLR) and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (*r*) were used to correlate the seven dimensions with the perceptions of overall thriving. The seven dimensions were social support, administrative support, sense of purpose, spirituality, effective training, and physical well-being and all determined to be statistically significant. Multiple linear regression (MLR) was used to identify the two most prominent predictors of overall thriving as social support and effective training. Multiple linear regression (MLR) was used on the two independent variables, personal thriving and professional thriving, to show personal thriving was slightly more robust in predicting overall thriving in law enforcement officers.

*Keywords:* thriving, law enforcement, sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, officer resilience

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement has been identified as one of the most stressful and demanding careers worldwide (Duran et al., 2018). Law enforcement officers face many job stressors including the constant threat of physical danger and helping victims of domestic violence and child abuse. Law enforcement officers face exposure to traumatic events, dealing with a frustrating judicial system, and coping with negative media coverage (Gordijn et al., 2017; Kirschman et al., 2014). “Police officers and many first responders see more misery and despair in the first few years of their jobs than the rest of us do in a lifetime” (Kirschman et al., 2014, p. 54). What makes a law enforcement officer thrive with all the negativity surrounding the profession?

The population in the United States increases every year. However, the number of law enforcement officers has not increased as rapidly as the population in the last several years. For example, the number of police officers increased from 1997 to 2016 by 8%, but the population increased by 21%. The Bureau of Justice Statistics studies showed the number of full-time sworn officers per 1,000 residents in the United States was 2.42 in 1997 and 2.17 in 2016, decreasing by 11%. In 2016, the number of full-time sworn officers was 701,273 while in 2018, the number of full-time sworn officers dropped to 687,100, illustrating a further decrease in police officers (Hyland, 2018). In May 2019, the number of police and sheriff’s patrol officers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics was, 665,280 (*Police and Sheriff’s Patrol Officers*, 2019). This decrease in police officers is concerning since the population in the United States continues to

increase. According to the United States Census Bureau the population in the U.S. in 1997 was 266,490,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). In 2010, the population was 309,349,689 and by 2019 the population was 328,239,523 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2019).

According to research done by the Pew Research Center, 86% of police officers agreed their law enforcement agency did not have enough officers patrolling the communities (Morin et al., 2017). Recruitment and retention are two issues facing law enforcement. According to the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), fewer people are applying to become police officers, and an increasing number of officers are leaving the job, many after only a few years in the workforce (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). A study conducted by PERF (2019) showed 36% of law enforcement agencies reported a significant decrease in job applicants for sworn positions and another 27% of agencies reported a slight decrease in job applicants. The law enforcement agencies who can identify the aspects related to a thriving law enforcement career may increase recruitment and retention in police officers. Knowing which factors promote thriving in law enforcement officers could lead to enhanced officers' job performance, improvement the mental and physical health of an officer, and increased public approval and safety (Baker et al., 2020).

### **Background of the Study**

Police officers suffer from higher levels of burnout, job dissatisfaction, and cynicism compared to other occupations (Schaible & Six, 2016) and numerous studies have been conducted on police burnout and poor well-being (Birch et al., 2017; Christopher et al., 2020; Hesketh et al., 2016; Santa Maria et al., 2019). Police officers suffering from burnout and high stress show higher rates of absenteeism and receive more complaints from citizens. Multiple studies have been conducted on workplace stressors for law enforcement (Baker et al., 2020;

Duran et al., 2018; Gutshall et al., 2017; Thoen et al., 2020). Furthermore, law enforcement agencies are negatively affected when officers are exposed to consistent high stress (Gordijn et al., 2017). Understanding the stressors within a law enforcement agency enables organizations to manage the impact stress has on an officer's well-being and performance (Duran et al., 2018). In addition, understanding what enables an officer to flourish or thrive in the workplace is important to mitigate the stressors. However, no studies regarding thriving specifically for law enforcement officers have been identified to date.

### **Thriving**

Thriving is more than surviving: "Thriving serves an adaptive function that helps individuals navigate and change their work contexts to promote their own development" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 537). It also contributes to good health, both physically and mentally. Thriving is a combination of learning and vitality, promoting forward self-progress in a person's self-development (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Dimitrova (2020) defined thriving from a business standpoint, stating thriving is essential in positive organizational structuring and promotes the "development and flourishing of employees" (Dimitrova, 2020, p. 370). Furthermore, thriving is a constant state of learning, improvement, and personal development. The study of thriving is important for business travelers because it connects aspects of the work role with the traveler's desire for career and personal growth. And research has shown that business leaders who do not provide opportunities for employee growth and development may suffer from high turnover and attrition (Dimitrova, 2020).

Schreiner et al. (2009), who popularized the term *thriving* for college students, defined thriving as "optimal functioning" (p. 12). For college students, three key elements involved in thriving were identified as intrapersonal well-being, interpersonal relationships, and academic

engagement and performance. A thriving college student is “fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally, and is experiencing a sense of community and psychological well-being that contributes to success and persistence to graduation” (Schreiner et al., 2009, p. 4). However, thriving can be applied to multiple fields. While academics may purely relate to a college student’s success, intrapersonal well-being and interpersonal relationships are important for any individual to thrive.

Intrapersonal well-being refers to optimism, well-being, one’s skill at mastering their environment, and coping skills. Coping skills can include the ability to handle stress. Interpersonal relationships relate to positive relationships, a sense of community, influencing the lives of others, and being open to diversity (Schreiner et al., 2009). The similarities for thriving as well as the workplace or institutional stressors are not just limited to one field. Law enforcement can relate to the intrapersonal well-being as well as the institutional stressors. Schreiner (2018) identified several external or institutional thriving barriers for students which are applicable to workplace scenarios. The lack of attention by school educators, inadequate advising by a professor, difficulty connecting with professors, institutional policies which hinder thriving, and a lack of institutional support are all student stressors (Schreiner, 2018). In the case of police officers, institutional stressors from the lack of positive attention, support, and inadequate advising would be from law enforcement supervision.

Forbes (2018) looked at thriving for emergency medicine personnel and identified well-being as flourishing or thriving in many aspects of an emergency medicine worker’s life. Well-being for medical personnel referred to overall physical, mental, and emotional health. Well-being also included financial and spiritual wellness (Forbes, 2018). The opposite of well-being in the workplace is burnout and can consist of emotional fatigue, a constant state of exhaustion,

emotional numbness, and the feeling of defeat on the job. Many stressors related to emergency medical personnel are internal or specific to one individual, but institutional and external stressors are also prevalent in the medical field (Forbes, 2018). The stressors in the medical field can translate into the law enforcement field as well. Officer well-being is one aspect associated with job satisfaction in law enforcement (Santa Maria et al., 2019). Santa Maria et al. (2019) linked well-being to engagement in a workplace. Engagement can refer to job fulfillment and conditions in the workplace that allow employees to reach their potential (Hesketh et al., 2016). Many studies exist regarding thriving in fields such as education (Austin, 2018; Schreiner, 2018), medicine (Forbes, 2018; Winkel et al., 2018), social work (Wendt et al., 2011), and business (Davies, 2017; Dimitrova, 2020). However, more research is needed on what thriving means for a law enforcement officer.

### **Potential Elements**

One element found to contribute to job satisfaction, and possibly thriving, in law enforcement is the motivation to perform public service (Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). The motivation to perform public service can also be occupational pride or a sense of purpose, and such opportunities to help people were listed as the top reason why 278 New York Police Department recruits chose to join the law enforcement agency (Gibbs, 2019). Spirituality is another aspect which may contribute to thriving and refers to a belief in God. Spirituality in law enforcement can be a buffering effect for an officer's occupational stress level (Charles et al., 2014). Spirituality and prayer may not only help with a first responder's work stress, but may also provide emotional healing (Malmin, 2013). Social or peer support networks are also elements that may lead to thriving in law enforcement. One of the top coping strategies for police officers is the use of social support which may include support from peers, family, or friends

(Clifton et al., 2018). Both longitudinal and cross-sectional research show increased social support is related to better mental health outcomes (Vig et al., 2020).

Job stressors in law enforcement are numerous. In law enforcement officers, organizational stressors can lead to burnout, alcoholism, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and even suicide (Duran et al., 2018). Lack of administrative support or administrative pressure is one of the organizational stressors for police officers (Baker et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2018; Thoen et al., 2020). While lack of administrative support may lead to officer stress, support from administration may lead to thriving in law enforcement.

Inadequate training was listed as another organizational stressor for law enforcement officers (Christopher et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2018; Gutshall et al., 2017). Greco and Fischetti (2018) suggest continuing education and even physical and tactical training provide “strategies to prevent and manage stress” and help officers “maintain a state of physical and mental well-being” (Greco & Fischetti, 2018, p. 559). Administrative support and effective training may be other elements that contribute to thriving for law enforcement officers.

Poor physical health in law enforcement officers is associated with low officer well-being (Baker et al., 2020, p. 98). Maintaining physical health, such as exercising, eating a balanced diet, and getting quality sleep, leads to increased energy and the ability to deal with daily problems more efficiently (Baker et al., 2020). Good physical health may also lead to less burnout, depression, and complaints of physical ailments (Santa Maria et al., 2019). Maintaining physical health may be a dimension for thriving in law enforcement. Officer resilience might be another aspect to thriving in law enforcement. Officer resilience and resilience training can help combat organizational and occupational stress (Christopher et al., 2020; Gutshall et al., 2017; Malmin, 2013; Moran, 2017).

Research into understanding why current law enforcement officers stay on the job and what makes officers thrive in the workplace may enable agencies to successfully recruit and retain officers. Based on research, the seven potential elements for thriving in law enforcement include sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020).

### **Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation**

Frederick Herzberg created a theory in the 1950's known as the motivation-hygiene theory, or the two-factor theory, and was originally based on the lives of engineers and accountants (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg's theory discusses motivation, such as benefits and pay and recognition. Herzberg's theory's secondary factor, hygiene, includes working conditions, job security, management quality, interaction with co-workers, and workplace policies and structure. For an employee to be satisfied the motivation factors must be met. To prevent job dissatisfaction, hygiene factors must be met. In this theory, motivation and hygiene are independent factors, and an employee can remain neutral and be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg's theory, which is based on recognition and reward, has been criticized for oversimplifying the relationship between dissatisfaction and motivation, having similar factors for both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and for the original study having a weak methodology ("Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation," 2017; *Two-Factor Theory of Motivation - Hygiene and Motivational Factor*, 2017). The second factor in Herzberg's theory relates to the potential aspects of thriving in law enforcement such as effective training and

administrative support but lacks the potential aspects such as spirituality, sense of purpose, officer resilience, and social support.

Maslow's Need Hierarchy theory is like Herzberg's theory in that it is a human motivation theory. Maslow's theory is based on human needs and satisfaction of those needs. Maslow created his theory in the 1940's and listed five sets of goals or basic needs in hierarchical order: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). According to Stewart et al. (2018), if Maslow's theory is adjusted for the workplace, the bottom and most basic tier would be physiological needs such as health insurance and financial compensation. The second tier would be job security and adequate workplace policies to keep employees safe. In the hierarchy of needs for the workplace the esteem tier is the relationship with co-workers and a positive work culture. The esteem tier in the workplace equates to a positive relationship with supervisors and the feeling of capability in one's work. Self-actualization is the top tier of Maslow's hierarchy and it equates to management helping employees meet their potential (Stewart et al., 2018). Maslow's theory, however, lacks empirical evidence and self-actualization is very difficult to measure. Maslow's theory, until one reaches the self-actualization tier, is more of a surviving theory rather than a thriving theory.

Seligman's (2011) well-being theory uses flourishing and well-being interchangeably (*PERMA<sup>TM</sup> Theory of Well-Being and PERMA<sup>TM</sup> Workshops: Positive Psychology Center, 2020*). Well-being can lead to less stress, less burnout, better health, better work performance, better decision-making, and less absenteeism (Kun et al., 2016). The well-being theory has five building blocks referred to as PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Positive emotion deals with both the past, present, and the future. The past may involve finding forgiveness or gratitude, the present may involve having

mindfulness, and the future may be a vision of hope (*PERMA™ Theory of Well-Being and PERMA™ Workshops: Positive Psychology Center, 2020*). Increasing the first building block, positive emotion, also involves doing whatever makes one happy and joyful, such as travel or exercise. According to Kun et al. (2016) positive emotion can help enhance one's performance at work.

Engagement, the second building block of Seligman's (2011) well-being theory, involves doing an activity for its own reward. Engagement is where someone uses their skills, attention, and strengths to work on a challenging task and can include sports training or performance. Seligman's (2011) third building block, relationships, include a sense of belonging, support, and connection to others. The fourth building block is meaning, which deals with a sense of purpose and can refer to serving and belonging to something bigger than oneself. Some examples of institutions which enable a sense of meaning in service or volunteerism include religion, justice, and the community (*PERMA™ Theory of Well-Being and PERMA™ Workshops: Positive Psychology Center, 2020*). Accomplishment in Seligman's (2011) well-being theory is the fifth building block and involves the pursuit of something for its own sake, being able to say one accomplished something and accomplished it well (Kun et al., 2016).

According to Seligman (2011) the benefits of well-being include less burnout, fewer sleep problems, better performance at work, better self-control, less depression and anxiety, and better physical health (*PERMA™ Theory of Well-Being and PERMA™ Workshops: Positive Psychology Center, 2020*). Seligman's (2011) theory fits well with many of the seven potential thriving aspects derived from research: sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience (Baker et al.,

2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

A workforce crisis currently exists for law enforcement agencies (Linos, 2018; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Society has seen a decline in the number of law enforcement officers in the workplace over the last several years. Studies have also shown officers are leaving the job within the first five years of employment, often to seek careers outside of law enforcement (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Recruitment and retention of officers is paramount for law enforcement agencies to continue to function safely and effectively. Several studies on law enforcement officers have been conducted including job satisfaction (Lechette, 2018), motivational factors (Cain, 2020), police stress (Crippen, 2018; Wu, 2018), and police officer well-being (Hayes, 2017). Studies have also been conducted on law enforcement officers' job perceptions regarding ethnicity (Quesada, 2017), gender (Barao, 2018; Souza, 2018), spirituality (Robinson, 2019), education level (Ramos, 2019; Souza, 2018), and emotional intelligence (Escamilla, 2017). Some of the factors in job perceptions for law enforcement, such as spirituality, emotional intelligence, or earning a higher education, may contribute to thriving for police officers. More research on what helps law enforcement officers thrive in the workplace is necessary.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. At this stage in the research thriving will be defined as well-being, resilience, and flourishing in law enforcement officers.

## **Overview of Methodology**

The sample population was convenient, non-probable, and purposive. Only sworn law enforcement officers from one county in the State of Florida were asked to participate. The sample of study participants were identified through access to allocation lists of approximately 620 sworn law enforcement officers at a large agency in central Florida. The population sampled for participation in the study was a collective of approximately 620 potential candidates. The focus of the study is sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience.

This study's survey instrument (Appendix B) was initially used in a pilot study to determine internal consistency. This study's research instrument consisted of four demographic questions and 25 5-point Likert scale items in which 1 represented the strongest disagreement with the item and 5 represented the strongest agreement with the item. The research instrument was created based upon the research studies on the seven potential aspects of thriving in law enforcement: sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). Sworn law enforcement officers within the large county agency in the State of Florida were emailed a link to the online survey. The surveys were voluntary and anonymous and the participants were ensured of the privacy of the answers provided in the survey. The researcher in this study is also a member of the county agency in Florida. The completed surveys were analyzed, and the data kept on a password protected computer stored in a locked office. The data will be kept for five years.

## **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what degree do study participants perceive themselves as thriving?
2. Considering study participant gender, education level, job assignment, and years of experience, was there was a statistically significant effect for these variables?
3. Considering the seven dimensions of thriving identified in the study, which is the most associated with and predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving?
4. Considering personal and professional thriving, which is the most predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving?

## **Overview of Analyses**

This study was considered non-experimental and quantitative using descriptive, cross-sectional survey research by specific research methodology. A convenient, purposeful sample consisting of sworn law enforcement officers from one large county law enforcement agency within the State of Florida represented the study's data source.

## **Data Analysis by Research Questions**

To address the first research question, a one sample *t*-test with ancillary analyses using between subjects of statistical means was used to determine to what degree study participants see themselves as thriving. For the second research question, between-subjects analytic techniques were implemented to identify among the four demographic topics, participant gender, education level, years of experience, or job assignment was there was a statistically significant effect for these variables. For the third research question, multiple linear regression (MLR) was used to determine which of the seven dimensions of thriving identified in the study is most associated with and predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving. For the fourth research

question, multiple linear regression (MLR) was implemented to address the predictive viability of the two independent variables – professional thriving and personal thriving.

### **Limitations**

This study was intended to provide information about factors related to thriving in law enforcement, however limitations do exist. The sample population was a non-probability convenient sample from one law enforcement agency and only included sworn law enforcement officers from a large, rural Florida agency which may not be representative of all law enforcement agencies in the nation or even the state of Florida. The law enforcement agency chosen for this study has not experienced some of the public antipathy other law enforcements in the nation have faced since 2014 when Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri (Marier & Moule Jr., 2019). Following the 2020 murder of George Floyd by police officers, defunding the police has become a political philosophy in some urban areas, such as Minneapolis and Seattle, but not in the county where the sample is located (Berlatsky, 2020). The hostility toward some law enforcement agencies has caused police officers to become more disengaged, led to low officer morale, and increased crime rates in urban communities like St Louis and New York City (Marier & Moule Jr., 2019). The county where the sample is located has not suffered from the same hostility, low morale, disengagement, or increased crime rates. Generalizations regarding thriving in law enforcement are limited to the sample population. Because the data was only collected at one point in time, this study does not examine changes which may occur over time.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following words and phrases are key terms for the study.

- **maintaining physical health:** Baker et al. (2020) suggested “regular exercise is an important and relatively independent contributor to LEO well-being” (p. 104). However, physical health also includes a healthy work-life balance, quality sleep, and a well-balanced diet.
- **officer resilience:** “the capacity to prepare for, recover from, and adapt in the face of stress, adversity, trauma, or challenge” (Ramey & Markovic, 2016, para. 1).
- **social support:** also known as peer support, social support includes co-workers, friends, and family members. It is a network of those a law enforcement officer can connect to for support which may be work-related or personal.
- **spirituality:** a belief in a power beyond oneself, specifically God
- **thriving:** Thriving is essential in positive organizational structuring and promotes the “development and flourishing of employees” (Dimitrova, 2020, p. 370). Thriving is a constant state of learning, improvement, and personal development. Schreiner et al. (2009) defined thriving as “optimal functioning” (p. 12). Thriving is a combination of well-being, resilience, and flourishing in the workplace.
- **well-being:** Well-being is multifaceted and goes beyond just physical and mental health. Well-being can include resilience and psychological flexibility (Baker et al., 2020; Forbes, 2018) and is normally referred to as an “individual’s state of being at a particular time” (Forbes, 2018, p. 266).

### **Significance**

According to the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), fewer people are applying to become police officers, and an increasing number of officers are leaving the job, many after only a few years in the workforce (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Research into which

factors allow law enforcement officers thrive in the workplace may enable agencies to successfully recruit and retain officers. Knowing which factors encourage thriving in law enforcement may also enhance officers' job performance, improve their mental and physical health, decrease officer burnout and depression, and increase both the public's approval and safety (Baker et al., 2020; Santa Maria et al., 2019).

### **Summary**

The decrease in the number of police officers on a yearly basis is concerning since the population in the United States continues to increase. One way to help recruit and retain police officers may be to identify the aspects associated with thriving in law enforcement. Thriving is more than just surviving in a job; thriving involves flourishing, well-being, resilience, and a constant state of personal development. The seven potential aspects of thriving for law enforcement officers discussed are sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020).

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the last 20 years, the number of people applying for government jobs has steadily decreased (Linos, 2018). Law enforcement agencies of all types are having problems recruiting and retaining officers (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Law enforcement officers are repeatedly exposed to traumatic incidents and face high occupational stress levels (Malmin, 2013). For officers, “violent deaths, horrific scenes, and other highly emotional and traumatic events are considered routine, and part of the job” (Gutshall et al., 2017, p. 465). Recruiting and retaining officers is more difficult, “especially in recent years given the increased scrutiny of police from highly publicized police shootings of unarmed black men” (Gibbs, 2019, p. 207). Burnout, anxiety, disassociation, stress, aggression, poor impulse control, and both physical and mental health issues are all associated with law enforcement and have negative connotations (Gutshall et al., 2017).

Although many studies focus on the negativity regarding law enforcement, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. Schreiner et al. (2005) examined thriving in education and equated thriving with terms such as well-being, optimism, and good coping skills. Thriving in law enforcement refers to going beyond enduring a job to earn a living. Thriving is a combination of overall physical, mental, and emotional health; resilience; and flourishing in the workplace (Forbes, 2018). This chapter examines literature regarding the aspects that may lead to law enforcement officers’

ability to thrive in the workplace. Based on the research, the seven potential elements for thriving in law enforcement include a sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in this study is Seligman's (2011) well-being theory, which uses flourishing and well-being interchangeably (*PERMA<sup>TM</sup> Theory of Well-Being and PERMA<sup>TM</sup> Workshops: Positive Psychology Center, 2020*). The well-being theory has five building blocks referred to as PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011).

The first building block, positive emotion, focuses on the past, present, and future. The past may involve finding forgiveness or gratitude, the present may involve having mindfulness, and the future may be a vision of hope (*PERMA<sup>TM</sup> Theory of Well-Being and PERMA<sup>TM</sup> Workshops: Positive Psychology Center, 2020*). Having positive emotion also involves doing whatever makes one happy and joyful, such as travel or exercise. The second building block of Seligman's (2011) well-being theory is engagement, which involves engaging in an activity for its own reward. Engagement occurs when someone uses their skills, attention, and strengths to work on challenging tasks or activities such as hobbies and recreation. Relationships are Seligman's (2011) third building block and include a sense of belonging, support, and connection to others. The fourth building block is meaning, which deals with a sense of purpose and can refer to serving and belonging to something bigger than oneself. Individuals may find a sense of meaning by being involved in their communities or religion (*PERMA<sup>TM</sup> Theory of Well-Being*

and *PERMA™ Workshops: Positive Psychology Center*, 2020). Accomplishment is the fifth building block and involves the pursuit of something for its own sake, being able to say one accomplished something and accomplished it well (Kun et al., 2016).

According to Seligman (2011), the benefits of well-being include less burnout, fewer sleep problems, better performance at work, better self-control, less depression and anxiety, and better physical health (*PERMA™ Theory of Well-Being and PERMA™ Workshops: Positive Psychology Center*, 2020). Seligman's (2011) theory fits well with many of the seven potential thriving aspects derived from research: sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020).

### **Thriving**

Thriving contributes to good health, mentally and physically (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thriving is a higher order construct consisting of two elements: vitality and learning (Dimitrova, 2020). Thriving in law enforcement can lead officers to “promote their own development” and promotes better physical and mental health (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 537). A law enforcement agency focusing on contributing to the officers' well-being and capability building may mean less absenteeism and lower health care costs. Schreiner (2005) identified several factors for thriving in education, including social connectedness, positive perspective, and engaged learning. For law enforcement, some of the same factors may be related to thriving in education; however, the research illuminates several other elements which may contribute to thriving for officers.

One element found to contribute to job satisfaction, and possibly thriving, in law enforcement is the motivation to perform public service or a sense of purpose (Prysmakova &

Vandenabeele, 2020). The opportunity to help people was listed as the top reason why 278 New York Police Department recruits chose to join the law enforcement agency (Gibbs, 2019).

Spirituality is another aspect which may contribute to thriving and refers to a belief in God.

Spirituality in law enforcement can be a safeguarding effect for an officer's occupational stress (Charles et al., 2014). Spirituality and prayer may not only help with a first responder's work stress but may also offer emotional healing (Malmin, 2013). Social or peer support networks are also elements which may lead to thriving in law enforcement. Use of social support may include support from peers, family, or friends and was listed as one of the leading coping strategies police officers use (Clifton et al., 2018). Both longitudinal and cross-sectional research indicate increased social support is related to improved mental health outcomes (Vig et al., 2020).

Administrative support may be another element of thriving in law enforcement, because a lack of administrative support is a primary organizational stressor in law enforcement associated with anxiety, depression, burnout, marital problems, PTSD, and suicide. Without administrative support, officers may feel undervalued, unimportant, neglected, and overworked (Duran et al., 2018). Maintaining physical health, such as exercising, eating a balanced diet, and getting quality sleep, is another potential contributor to thriving in law enforcement. Maintaining physical health leads to increased energy and the ability to deal with daily problems more efficiently (Baker et al., 2020). Effective training for officers may be an element in thriving for law enforcement. Because inadequate training is an organizational stressor for officers, continued education and training can have a positive effect on law enforcement officers' physical and mental well-being (Greco & Fischetti, 2018). Officer resilience is the final potential contributor to thriving in law enforcement as it may help officers overcome and adapt to adversity and trauma. Improving officer resilience can be key to maintaining physical and mental health (Thoen et al., 2020).

## **Sense of Purpose**

A sense of purpose in law enforcement can be defined as “the motivation to contribute to society well-being” (Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020, p. 304). Gibbs (2019) identified an opportunity to help others as a main motivational factor for minorities and women to join law enforcement. Some law enforcement officers identify their work “as not just a job, but also a calling, that intrinsically held profound moral value and justice” (Malmin, 2013, p. 752). To those who work in law enforcement, a sense of purpose refers to occupational pride, a calling, a sense of meaning, or a sense of fulfillment.

Public service motivation theory refers to the ambition to help shape the well-being of society and do good for others. Public service motivation also refers to “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions” (Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020, p. 305). Prysmakova and Vandenabeele (2020) researched the relationship between public service motivation, also viewed as a sense of purpose, and job satisfaction. The concept of public service motivation normally refers to publicly oriented organizations and had not been studied from a law enforcement viewpoint even though many law enforcement officers choose their profession to help people in the community and fight crime (Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020).

Prysmakova and Vandenabeele (2020) recognized a gap in research for law enforcement job satisfaction. Many studies were conducted on negative work-related experiences and stress contributing to low job satisfaction for law enforcement officers, but few studies were conducted on positive elements regarding how a sense of purpose related to job satisfaction. In examining job satisfaction, Prysmakova and Vandenabeele (2020) studied the person-environment fit theory. The person-environment fit theory states people and their environments interact, and a fit occurs

when personal characteristics are aligned with environmental characteristics. Environmental characteristics include organizational expectations, values, requirements, job tasks, organizational teams, or supervisors. The two types of fit studied by Prysmakova and Vandenberghe (2020) for law enforcement were person-organization fit and person-job fit. Person-organization fit refers to the consistency between goals or values while person-job fit refers to the consistency between individual abilities and job demands. Prysmakova and Vandenberghe (2020) hypothesized that public service motivation related positively to job satisfaction only when a good fit between the organization and the job were present for law enforcement officers. Prysmakova and Vandenberghe (2020) also hypothesized that an increase in public service motivation would increase levels of job satisfaction among law enforcement officers.

The sample population for the study by Prysmakova and Vandenberghe (2020) was 305 police officers from Warsaw, Poland. The Warsaw city police employ about 2,000 people and are the largest police agency in Poland. The study collected data regarding public service motivation. Paper-pencil surveys were used to collect the data. Of the 1,000 officers who received the survey, 305 responded, or 30.5% (Prysmakova & Vandenberghe, 2020). The public service motivation was determined using a modified global measure scale with four main items on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey asked respondents to rate 15 statements for the four main categories of public service motivation, job satisfaction, person-organization fit, and person-job fit. How motivated the officer was to contribute to society, how often the job bores the officer, and how the personal goals of the officer relate to the job were some of the statements rated by the officers. The results of the study showed a strong significant correlation between public service motivation and person-organization fit and person-job fit.

Prysmakova and Vandenabeele (2020) conducted a second study which sought to identify how the relationship between public service motivation and job satisfaction related to person-organization and person-job fits. The sample population for the second study was 207 police officers from Belgium. The second study used the data from Belgium to study a dimensional measure of public service motivation. Paper-pencil surveys were utilized to collect the data. The Belgium study used a separate instrument to measure public service motivation and a shortened version of the job satisfaction survey. Person-organization and person-job fits were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The results of the surveys indicated a statistically significant association between person-organization and person-job fits with public service motivation and job satisfaction. All public service motivation dimensions had a significant relationship with job satisfaction. Commitment to public values had the strongest effect with a 0.89.

The studies in both Poland and Belgium supported the hypotheses that demonstrating public service motivation can be used to determine the job satisfaction of police officers. The Belgian study showed when public service motivation and the organization and job fit increases, job satisfaction also increases for the law enforcement officer. The studies conducted by Prysmakova and Vandenabeele (2020) added to the knowledge regarding relationships between job satisfaction and public service motivation, especially in the field of law enforcement. The studies also strengthened the idea of public service motivation being applicable in law enforcement and not just public administration. The two-study design emphasized the careful selection of officers is necessary to ensure compatibility with job and organization tasks because “the potential neglect of person-environment fit might lead to low satisfaction and unfulfilled motivations of the officers, resulting in weaker commitment to the profession” (Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020, p. 313).

Prysmakova and Vandenabeele (2020) looked at an officer's sense of purpose or public service motivation from a global viewpoint. Gibbs (2019) conducted a study on what motivated women and minorities to seek careers as law enforcement officers. More prevalent media scrutiny of law enforcement officers and police agencies due to the shootings of unarmed black males has led police agencies to concentrate on diversifying the workforce. Gibbs (2019) expanded on the need for diversity indicating "in the current climate, the media, politicians and the public alike are calling for police forces to look like the public they serve" (p. 207). However, recruiting qualified minorities and women into the police force is challenging. Gibbs' (2019) study, which aimed to gain a better understanding of why minorities and women chose to work in law enforcement, was conducted to help with recruitment efforts.

Gibbs' (2019) study was conducted as part of a larger project at a police agency in the northeastern United States. The final convenience sample consisted of 195 minorities and women who applied to become police officers between 2009 and 2015. Of the 195 subjects studied, 63.4% were male minorities and 36.6% were women. The study was conducted via telephonic survey in 2015 and 2016. During the telephonic survey, each police applicant was asked why he or she applied to become a police officer. The question was open-ended, but if the applicant listed several reasons, the researcher asked for the top reason. The responses from the applicants were later grouped into 10 categories, which were partially based on prior research. The top 10 reasons included salary or benefits; job security; wanting to make a difference or the opportunity to help people; family members or friends were law enforcement officers; childhood dream; the prestige of the law enforcement agency; a college degree in criminal justice; the transition from military to police; no particular reason; or other (Gibbs, 2019).

The top two motivations for applying to a law enforcement agency as a minority or woman were because it was a childhood dream and to make a difference in society or help others. Salary and job security ranked lowest on the top 10 motivators for minorities and women becoming a police officer. To get a more personal perspective, Gibbs (2019) asked applicants their motivation for applying to be a police officer as an open-ended question rather than having the applicants chose from a list of motivators. The results of Gibbs' (2019) study contrasted with several previous studies of law enforcement officers which showed salary and job security were the top motivators for a career in law enforcement. According to the findings, law enforcement agency recruitment efforts for minorities and women should concentrate on the lead motivational factors such as providing the opportunity to help others and fulfilling a childhood dream.

To help law enforcement agencies with recruitment and retention, Can et al. (2016) conducted a study to create a psychometrically sound scale to measure patrol officers' job satisfaction. Can et al. (2016) created a 14-item Patrol Officer Job Satisfaction Scale (POJSS) with three dimensions: occupational pride, peer comradery, and supervisor fairness. Knowing which factors related to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction may assist law enforcement agencies in assessing their strengths and weaknesses and allow agencies to make changes as necessary to improve job satisfaction. Can et al.'s (2016) secondary purpose of the study examined whether the dimensions of job satisfaction for law enforcement were associated with individual officer demographics.

The convenience sample consisted of patrol officers from six counties in Pennsylvania and Texas, along with Turkish officers from police precincts of Istanbul Police Department. The main researcher of the study was a law enforcement officer for 18 years with the Turkish National Central Bureau and Interpol before becoming a professor at Pennsylvania State

University. The surveys were completed anonymously either online via Survey Monkey or by pencil-paper survey. A total of 426 officers returned the survey, 231 from the United States and 195 from Turkey. Only 221 of the officers became participants because they had the prerequisite rank of patrol officer and completed the entire survey. To examine the test-retest reliability, 14 patrol officers completed the survey anonymously on two occasions about one month apart. The participants rated 38 items on a 5-point Likert scale.

The results of the analysis of the 38 items on the survey produced the new 14-item POJSS with the three dimensions of occupational pride, peer comradery, and supervisor fairness. Within the three dimensions, three items concentrated on the dimension of occupational pride, five items on peer comradery, and six items on supervisor fairness. The three dimensions of the POJSS had good internal reliability with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  scores all 0.70. The POJSS also had acceptable goodness-of-fit, and test-retest reliability for both population samples from the United States and Turkish law enforcement officers. Regarding the second purpose of the study, the results from multiple regression analyses (supervisor fairness  $p = 0.058$ , peer comradery  $p = 0.516$ , occupational pride  $p = .281$ ) showed none of the nine departmental and individual demographic variables were significantly associated with any of the three dimensions of the POJSS (Can et al., 2016). The nine departmental and individual demographic variables were gender, age, marital status, college education, years of law enforcement service, weekly work hours, nation (United States or Turkey), city location, and department size. The results of the findings regarding the demographic variables suggested the three dimensions of the POJSS, occupational pride, peer comradery, and supervisor fairness, could be relevant for police officers of various locations and conditions (Can et al., 2016). Cal et al. (2016) surmised law

enforcement agencies utilizing the POJSS with their patrol officers could target areas which need help to encourage better recruitment and retention.

Can et al. (2016) discovered the importance of occupational pride, or a sense of purpose, for law enforcement officers. Occupational pride is one of the main three items on a scale showing patrol officers' job satisfaction. The significance of occupational pride as a main item illustrates a sense of purpose may be a key element in thriving for law enforcement officers of all genders and races. The other two main factors in the POJSS, supervisor fairness and peer comradery, relate to potential aspects in thriving for law enforcement for administrative support and social support.

### **Social Support**

Social support can refer to law enforcement officers seeking advice and talking to colleagues, family, and friends (Clifton et al., 2018). Social support can also mean having a confidant, a partner to do activities with, and a provider of material aid (Feldman et al., 2020). Specifically, "social support has been shown to be a robust predictor of mental health in first responders" (Feldman et al., 2020, p. 2). Research indicates police officers who have poor social support and inadequate coping skills are more likely to have mental health problems like PTSD and major depressive disorder (Clifton et al., 2018). Social support is a supportive social network consisting of friends, family, or co-workers who provide emotional support, advice, and companionship.

Clifton et al. (2018) examined coping strategies used by police following the acts of violence against law enforcement officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Dallas, Texas in 2016. The two incidents occurred within 10 days of each other and a total of eight officers were killed

and 11 officers injured. Clifton et al. (2018) looked at how coping strategies affected work motivation at a unique moment in time when officers were more likely to use coping strategies.

Clifton et al. (2018) hypothesized officers using maladaptive strategies to cope would result in lower levels of expressed job motivation. Maladaptive strategies for officers coping with stress included using drugs or alcohol, coping by avoidance, or internalizing the stressful event using self-help instead of seeking help from others. Clifton et al. (2018) hypothesized law enforcement officers using adaptive strategies would have greater levels of expressed job motivation. Adaptive strategies for coping with stress included seeking social support and exercise. Clifton et al. (2018) studied 2,659 active and sworn law enforcement officers in the United States. The sample population included law enforcement officers from local sheriff's departments, local police departments, campus police departments, and state police departments. The sample was not representative of the larger law enforcement community because the sample was disproportionately White and from small law enforcement agencies.

The officers were asked to complete a 38-question survey online. The survey included questions regarding law enforcement coping skills in dealing with the mass shootings of officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge and the officers' thoughts on the ability to use force. During the survey, officers were asked about perceived changes at work after the officer-involved shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and the officer shootings in Dallas and Baton Rouge. The survey also asked about law enforcement officers' perceptions of crime-control strategies (Clifton et al., 2018).

The dependent variable for the study was post-Dallas/Baton Rouge work motivation. Thirteen independent factors were determined using factor analysis and included items such as talking to friends or family, talking to a fellow officer, exercising, drinking, praying, and not

expressing feelings. An ordered logistic regression analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage of the study investigated using coping strategies to predict work motivation for law enforcement officers. In the second stage of the study, researchers added the variables of age, rank, gender, race, education, agency size, and current motivation.

The results of the first part of the study suggested three main coping strategies were used by law enforcement after the Dallas/Baton Rouge shootings. The first coping method was the use of social support, which included friends, co-workers, and family. The second coping strategy was stoic self-help or internally dealing with stressful events. The third coping mechanism was relying on self-medication, like eating, drinking, or smoking. Those who used social support or self-help also reported using prayer to cope whereas those using self-medication were not likely to use prayer to cope with the stress (Clifton et al., 2018). The study showed the main coping strategies led to a decrease in motivation in the six months following the shootings in Dallas/Baton Rouge. None of the coping strategies increased work motivation for the law enforcement officers after the officer deaths in Dallas and Baton Rouge. The researchers expected a decrease in motivation with the use of maladaptive strategies but not in the use of adaptive strategies. The reason social support did not increase job motivation within the six months of the shootings may be due to the time frame and recentness of the events or because of the ongoing backlash against law enforcement. Some areas of the United States, such as Seattle, Washington and Ferguson, Missouri have faced ongoing issues with protesters and attempts to defund the police (Marier & Moule Jr., 2019). A constant barrage of negativity toward police may equate to a decrease in job motivation, regardless of the coping strategies utilized.

The results of the second part of the study conducted by Clifton et al. (2018), when the variables were added, showed the same significance for the coping strategies as the first part of

the study. Female law enforcement officers' motivation was found to be more adversely affected by the shootings than the male officers' motivation. Because female law enforcement officers appeared to be more negatively affected by the shootings, gender-specific coping training may need to be implemented by law enforcement agencies. The study also showed peer support was often used by younger officers rather than older officers. Many officers also utilize social support networks in the workplace and not at home, preferring to rely on peers over family members for support.

Researchers surmised the support networks may not have been motivational since the networks were not professional support, such as psychiatric help, but social support. Clifton et al. (2018) deduced peer support may have confirmed the grievances each officer was having regarding the shootings of fellow officers, which is an affirmation of negative emotions. Clifton et al. (2018) concluded the need for law enforcement agencies to identify strategies to cope with stress and increase motivation is imperative. Social support is still a major strategy used by law enforcement officers to cope with stress in the workplace. But, as Clifton et al.'s (2018) study shows, the use of social support may not increase job motivation for officers in all instances. However, social support still may contribute to thriving in law enforcement for many officers. And, while social support may not increase job motivation in certain situations, gaining support from peers and family can help mitigate work stressors and assist with mental health issues.

Both longitudinal and cross-sectional research show that increased social support is related to better mental health outcomes (Vig et al., 2020). Research on military members showed an increase in social support after deployment helped combat depression and PTSD symptoms (Pietrzak et al., 2009). In addition, first responders are exposed to stressors that are likely to be psychologically traumatic on a regular basis.

Vig et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine if perceived social support was linked to differences in rates of PTSD and major depressive disorder (MDD) symptoms for first responders in Canada. The 4,238 participants were a mixture of law enforcement, firefighters, correctional workers, public safety communications officers, and paramedics. Vig et al. (2020) first hypothesized different public safety personnel (PSP) groups would report diverse levels of perceived social support. The second hypothesis stated increased levels of perceived social support would equate to lower levels of MDD and PTSD for the PSP groups (Vig et al., 2020).

The participants completed anonymous online surveys on the Life Events Checklist for DSM-5, the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5, the Patient Health Questionnaire, and the Social Provisions Scale. The Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 examines the lifetime history of events that could be potentially psychologically traumatic. The Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 included 16 events that were modified for PSP. Instead of an incident like a traffic crash, commonly worked by police or paramedics but not something experienced every day by a non-public safety person, a serious traffic crash was listed. A serious crash would include fatalities that were not worked by PSP on a routine basis. The survey responses were used to measure the level of potential psychological trauma for the PSP. The response options included an indicator if the event was worked as part of the PSP's job, rather than something which happened to, or was witnessed by, the PSP. The Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 was only used by the researchers to determine if the participants experienced at least one potentially psychologically traumatic event.

The PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 was a self-reported measure of PTSD symptoms experienced by the participants in the past month. Participants ranked 21 statements regarding PTSD symptoms using a 5-point Likert scale. A combination of the Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 and PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 was used to determine if the participants of the study

were considered to have screened positive for PTSD. Participants had to have at least one potentially psychologically traumatic event from the Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 and a score of 32 or greater on the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 to be considered screened positive for PTSD. The Patient Health Questionnaire was a nine-item self-reporting measure of depression symptoms and was a good indicator to detect MDD. The 10-item Social Provisions Scale was a shortened version of the original Social Provisions Scale. The Social Provisions Scale was used to determine perceived social support using a self-reported 4-point Likert scale survey.

A total of 8,520 participants began the survey, but only 4,283 completed the entire study. The 4,283 participants included 1,086 police officers and 593 correctional officers and workers. The remainder of the 2,604 participants were firefighters, paramedics, and other PSP. The results of the study showed the police officers and paramedics reported the lowest levels of perceived social support compared to the other PSP groups. For the police officers, the study showed higher perceived social support was associated with lower odds of screening positive for PTSD and significantly lower odds of screening positive for MDD. For every 1-point increase in perceived social support, police officers were 7-10% less likely to screen positive for PTSD and 11-15% less likely to screen positive for MDD. The results of the study by Vig et al. (2020) were consistent with past research (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2010; Santini et al., 2015; Thoits, 2011) showing a relationship between improved mental health outcomes and greater perceived social support.

Clifton et al. (2018) was looking at job motivation and not the mental health aspects for social support and concentrated on a specific time frame when law enforcement officers were experiencing heightened adversity and stress. Vig et al. (2020) conducted a study in Canada, where perceived stressors and mental health issues for public safety personnel may differ from

American public safety personnel. The self-reporting instruments were limited in both studies to coping strategies, stressors, and mental health issues. Both studies are useful and demonstrate the need for further research into peer support as it relates to law enforcement officers' ability to thrive. Social support and the feeling of connectedness are necessary due to the "high emotional toll on policing that tends to depersonalize police officers" (Moran, 2017, p. 344).

### **Spirituality**

Most police officers deal with situations the rest of the population cannot imagine. The resiliency of officers to deal with the traumas and crises has become the topic of many research articles (Charles et al., 2014). Spirituality has many definitions and may be looked at as "a religious or intellectual process of reforming which assists in finding greater meaning and purpose of our own existence as well as creating harmony with the created universe" (Pokhariyal, 2020, p. 65). Pokhariyal (2020) advised spirituality was interest in more than just one's body, but also the human soul or spirit. Bouckaert and Zsolnai's (2012) study defined spirituality as "people's multiform search for a deep meaning of life interconnecting them to all living beings and to 'God' or 'Ultimate Reality'" (p. 491). Spirituality is defined as a belief in God. As Malmin (2013) stated, "Spirituality is an invisible weapon. The Psalmist phrased it with different wording, but the concept remains the same. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble* (Psalm 46:1)" (p. 754). Evidence-based research has shown people who possess spirituality and faith receive benefits to their well-being and health (Malmin, 2013).

Charles et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study to see if a correlation existed between law enforcement officers' levels of spirituality and their level of brain integration. Brain integration in Charles et al.'s (2014) study refers to psychological performance. Charles et al.

(2014) looked at how the brain functioned in the police officers' stressful workplace when spirituality was intertwined in the work. Charles et al. (2014) posited, "police officers incorporating spirituality using practices such as meditation, prayer, self-reflection may lead to buffering the toxic effects of stress as well as enhance transformation of the individual and the organization" (p. 232). During 60–90-minute in-depth interviews, eight core questions regarding police work and spirituality were asked of 33 police officers in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Charles et al. (2014) focused on the officers' having a sense of calling and serving the community. At the start of their careers, many officers reported feeling disillusioned at the low judicial sentences for criminals. Officers in the study explained as their careers continued, an understanding of a higher justice following the criminals beyond the judicial system provided a sense of peace with the low judicial sentences. In the interviews, other officers indicated their police work was part of God's plan. One detective stated she knew she was where God wanted her as a Crimes against Children detective. The detective's faith lessened the stress of working child crimes investigations (Charles et al., 2014). Officers feel God's work is being done, and a voice is provided for those in the community who cannot defend themselves (Malmin, 2013). A minority of the officers did not believe law enforcement was a calling. One officer only had faith in himself to provide for his family and had stopped following religion when he was younger. A second officer who spoke of his moral compass being weak quit his job shortly after the interview and left the study (Charles et al., 2014). Even though the study was limited by the small sample size, the study showed spirituality may have potential buffering effects on work-related stress for law enforcement officers (Charles et al., 2014).

Charles et al. (2014) conducted a follow-up study on 11 of the 33 original officers who showed a strong spiritual basis for police work. The second study was a single group design and Charles et al. (2014) looked at the performance, brainwave, and psychological data. The second study used psychological tests and electroencephalogram (EEG) measurements. The psychological tests conducted on the 11 participants were the Brain Integration scale, the Stroop color-word test, the Perceived Stress scale, and the Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale.

The EEG protocol or Brain Integration scale recorded officers' EEG from 32 electrodes. The officers had to listen for a tone in each ear, much like a hearing test, and press a button when the tone was heard. The officers also had to view a computer screen and press a button in either their left or right hand to select which image on the computer appeared larger in value. The Brain Integration scale provided a single value for the police officers, which was added to the normative database and converted to *z*-scores.

The Stroop color-word test involved a timed test as officers named color words, such as green or yellow, when the word was written in different color ink. For example, the word red would be written in blue ink. During the test, participants go through several trials both reading the written word and then naming the color the ink is in. The difference in the reaction time between the different trials is the color-word interference effect. The Stroop color-word test color-word interference effect was determined by subtracting the reaction time for the word test from the reaction time for naming the color ink for the word (Charles et al., 2014).

Charles et al. (2014) gave two surveys to officers. The Perceived Stress scale measured the officers' perceived stress, and the Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale measured the officers' worldviews. The Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale offered 38

statements regarding spiritual worldviews using a 7-point Likert scale. A high score of 60 on the Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale indicated a more transcendental orientation to life, while a lower score indicated a more materialistic orientation to life. Scores on the Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale correlated highly with the meaningfulness of life and positive inner growth. Standardized scoring was used on both scales. The Perceived Stress scale results showed an average score of 18.6, which indicated the officers did not report stress felt at work. The Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale average was 23. A single officer had a -14.5 score on the Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale and the highest level on the Perceived Stress scale, indicating possible burnout.

Charles et al. (2014) used a Pearson correlation analysis was used to explore the patterns of the four measures: reaction time from the Stroop color-word test, scores on the Perceived Stress scale, the Brain Integration scale score, and the Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale score. For statistical significance, an alpha level of  $p < .05$  (two-tailed) was accepted. The data were tested for normality since correlation analysis is sensitive to outliers. All four variables were found to be normal. Skewness and kurtosis were less than 1.0 showing that the data were normally distributed.

Most of the officers' showed high scores on the Brain Integration scale and average scores on the Perceived Stress scale, Stroop color-word test, and Beliefs about Consciousness and Reality scale. The Brain Integration scale correlated inversely with the Perceived Stress scale, showing lower levels of perceived stress were linked to higher levels of brain integration. The study showed all the participants performed spiritual practices, most using prayer and approximately half practicing meditation. Spirituality may be an important aspect of thriving for many law enforcement officers. According to Moran (2017), "within the context of suffering and

first responders, spirituality and religiosity can mediate the processing of trauma and emotional and psychological damage” (p. 355).

### **Administrative Support**

Organizational stressors in law enforcement, such as lack of administrative support, have been associated with anxiety, depression, burnout, marital problems, PTSD, and suicide (Duran et al., 2018). Lack of administrative support is a significant predictor of psychological distress. Officers should feel a sense of general support from the administration, discussing things like officer well-being without a fear of retaliation or a breach of confidentiality (Thoen et al., 2020). Administrative support refers to the employer supporting, appreciating, advocating for, and backing law enforcement officers on the job, even when faced with opposition. Administrative support can refer to a law enforcement officer’s immediate supervisor, middle management, and senior staff within the law enforcement agency.

Duran et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study regarding employee and employer relationships in law enforcement agencies, as well as the well-being of law enforcement officers. The study was conducted in the United Kingdom and identified two sources of stress for law enforcement officers: operational and organizational stressors. Operational stressors include critical decision-making skills, life-threatening situations, exposure to death and violence, and the pressure to perform the job efficiently. Organizational stressors include working shifts, inadequate training, working weekends, problems or poor relationships with co-workers and supervisors, and a lack of administrative support.

When looking at administrative support as a stressor for law enforcement officers, the psychological contract is a key element. The psychological contract is a relationship between the employee and the employer and refers to the mutual beliefs between both parties. The feelings by

the employee, or officer, that their obligations are being met are referred to as psychological contract fulfillment. High levels of trust between employees and employers, lower job-related anxiety and depression, and greater levels of job satisfaction are associated with psychological contract fulfillment. When employees, or officers, feel obligations are unmet, a perceived psychological contract breach occurs. The psychological contract breach can cause an imbalance in employee and employer relationships and promote more job-related stress. The psychological contract theory provided a framework to study what stressors exist in the work environment for law enforcement and why those stressors exist. Duran et al. (2018) acknowledged some organizational stressors may be accepted as part of the job because those stressors are part of the psychological contract. Other stressors may not be accepted because they constitute a psychological contract breach. Officers may have different psychological contracts which may lead to differences in work stressors. Few studies have been conducted regarding the importance of psychological contracts between employees and employers in a law enforcement setting.

The study by Duran et al. (2018) involved 18 active, full-time police officers from one county in the United Kingdom. A private, telephonic, semi-structured interview was conducted with each officer. The interview asked demographic as well as open-ended questions. The open-ended questions included the officers' reasons for joining the police force, stressors, and ways to manage stressors, the impact of the job on the officers' well-being, and the officers' current perceptions of employer and employee obligations. The interviews were audio recorded and ranged from 49-68 minutes. After the interviews, the officers were contacted via email and given two weeks to withdraw from the study before the audio files were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analyzed, coded, and then categorized into themes.

The six main themes which emerged from the officer interviews were motivation, stressors, mutual obligations, negative consequences, positive impact of the job, and mediators. The motivation theme referred to the reason the officer joined the police force. The theme of stressors identified operational stressors such as dealing with traumatic situations and being unable to help someone with a problem. The stressor theme also found 70% of the officers complained about a heavier workload due to understaffing. The employers expected the officers to work overtime to combat the workload, and the officers believed the employers' expectations to be unrealistic.

The theme of mutual obligations included employee and employer obligations and was the most related to administrative support of all the themes. The employee obligations included loyalty and task achievement. The employer obligations included fairness, valuing employees, appropriate equipment, flexibility, and support. The employees/officers believed the law enforcement agency expected them to promote a positive image and guard the reputation of the agency. Fifty-eight percent of officers also felt the administration unrealistically expected multiple tasks to be performed at the same time even with a shortage in officers. The officers thought the administration just gave orders and did not have a good understanding of what the problems were or how the staff shortage affected the officers. Half of the officers in the study felt they were not supported by the administrators or higher-ranking law enforcement officers. Sixteen of the officers believed the obligations had changed over time. Some officers thought the change was because of more politics in the agency; other officers wished for the administration to have more realistic obligations. Over half of the officers felt the administration had breached the psychological contract. The officers made several comments about feeling they were neglected by the administration, undervalued as employees, unsupported in times of need, and

less important than potential recruits (Duran et al., 2018). Half of the officers stated they felt a breach of obligation in trust either with the administration or colleagues. The officers stated they were unable to trust the administration with maintaining confidentiality.

Negative consequences were another theme found in Duran et al.'s (2018) study. Some of the negative consequences associated with psychological contract breach and law enforcement stressors were sleep problems and burnout. Sleep problems included nightmares, disturbed sleep, lack of sleep due to shift work, and fatigue. Fatigue led to mental exhaustion, irritability, and depression, both at work and at home. Two of the officers interviewed in the study admitted to being burned out from the high workloads and unrealistic demands by the administration. The study analysis also showed 55% of the officers were not satisfied with the job. The dissatisfaction was potentially linked to organizational stressors and the employee-employer obligations, which were unrealistic.

In Duran et al.'s (2018) study, the positive impact of the job theme showed the officers still enjoyed their jobs and the way the job affected their personal lives in a positive way. The officers shared that personal growth, helping people, and developing friendships with colleagues all occurred over time on the job. Mediators, the final theme in the study, emphasized the internal and external support officers received on the job. Internal support referred to the support officers received inside of the law enforcement agency. Most of the officers reported seeking support from colleagues, senior officers, and administration. Three of the officers reported receiving assistance from the administration in the form of flexible work hours to help the officers' care for their families. External support referred to the support received by the officers from outside of the law enforcement agency. Officers mentioned they turned to family members, friends, and

their doctors, as well as using de-stressing techniques such as walking, fishing, and playing video games.

Duran et al.'s (2018) study emphasized how important administrative support is for a law enforcement officer. Without administrative support, officers may feel undervalued, unimportant, neglected, and overworked. Administrative support means officers understand the job tasks and heavy workload and the administration empathizes with the staff shortages and appreciates and acknowledges the hard work of the officers. The interviews in this study also highlight the many levels of administrative support, from immediate supervisor to high-ranking staff in the law enforcement agency. Each administrator plays an important role in how an officer feels regarding their job. Officer retention and recruitment may be dependent on administrative support.

### **Maintaining Physical Health**

Recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers rely, in part, on physical health. Physical fitness tests are mandatory for hiring, and maintaining physical health is important throughout a law enforcement career. Few law enforcement agencies have lowered the physical fitness standards; many agencies instead have chosen to offer health club and gym incentives for officers (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). In some cases “poor physical health is associated with low LEO well-being” (Baker et al., 2020, p. 98). Law enforcement officers are exposed to a myriad of occupational stressors, which can cause both physical and mental health issues. Physically, officers can suffer from metabolic syndrome and are prone to higher rates of cardiovascular disease due to stress. Sleep problems from shift work, work-related stress, or nightmares can lead to poor physical health. Chronic back pain is also a problem for many officers from carrying around the gear, such as a duty belt, and sitting in a patrol car for hours at a time. The stress between periods of inactivity and sudden activity, sitting to chasing suspects or

making arrests, can cause physical strain as well. Regular exercise and eating a balanced diet are linked to increased energy, the ability to handle daily problems easier, and an overall more positive quality of life (Baker et al., 2020). Maintaining physical health is defined as regular exercise, a balanced diet, a healthy balance between work and life, and quality sleep.

Baker et al. (2020) conducted a study on the relationship between psychological flexibility, physical health, and well-being for law enforcement officers. Psychological flexibility “is a behavioral model of adaptive human functioning, wherein individuals are open to and connected with internal experiences in the service of increased engagement in value-guided behavioral action” (Baker et al., 2020, p. 99). Baker et al. (2020) conducted an evaluation of physical health as self-reported by law enforcement officers and specifically looking at chronic pain, regular exercise, quality sleep, good hydration, and a balanced diet. Baker et al. (2020) hypothesized low psychological flexibility and physical health would be related to low officer well-being.

Three law enforcement agencies in diverse geographical areas participated in the study. Law enforcement officers from each agency were provided an online link to the survey which was anonymous and voluntary. A total of 459 law enforcement officers participated in the online survey. Officers answered a 7-item acceptance and action questionnaire-II regarding psychological flexibility, using a 7-point Likert scale. Officers rated statements regarding their feelings and worries and how those feelings and worries affected their ability enjoy life. The second portion of the online study consisted of the World Health Organization’s 5-item, 6-point Likert scale measure of general well-being, known as the WHO-5 well-being index. The WHO-5 consists of questions regarding energy, vitality, and general interests. For law enforcement officers, the WHO-5 inversely correlates with occupational burnout and PTSD symptoms. The

WHO-5 was used to determine the officers' physical health assessing items related to sleep quality, chronic pain, diet, water intake, and exercise (Baker et al., 2020).

Baker et al.'s (2020) results from the study showed quality sleep, regular exercise, subjective chronic pain, and a balanced diet occur, in part, through psychological flexibility. Water intake did not show to be significantly related to psychological flexibility or an officer's well-being. A significant finding by Baker et al. (2020) was regular exercise,  $t = 5.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , exerted the strongest relative direct effect on an officer's well-being. The researchers acknowledged exercise for law enforcement officers appears to be a healthy behavior associated with well-being and not specifically related to psychological flexibility. Maintaining physical health through regular exercise, a balanced diet, and quality sleep were found to contribute to law enforcement officers' well-being and potentially, thriving.

### **Effective Training**

There are several organizational stressors in law enforcement, including ineffective training (Christopher et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2018; Gutshall et al., 2017). Effective training, to include continuing education, physical, tactical, and professional development training, can aid in mitigating officer stress "that causes harmful physical and emotional reactions and threatens the quality of life" (Greco & Fischetti, 2018, p. 559). Many aspects of law enforcement require training, from the historical crime-fighting skills to the current and evolving technological skills to combat ever-increasing cybercrimes (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Effective training is essential in recruitment and retention.

Greco and Fischetti (2018) conducted a study of Italian police officers observing the relationship between physical, tactical, and technical training and stress management in law enforcement compared to average citizens. The first sample consisted of 101 male officers from

the state police in the Apulia region of Italy. A secondary representative sample of the Italian population consisted of non-law enforcement males with various work backgrounds. Greco and Fischetti (2018) also used already existing standardized test validation studies to compare with the law enforcement officers. A self-administered paper and pencil questionnaire was completed by the officers and citizens. The questionnaire included the Occupational Stress Indicator and the Short Form-12. The Occupational Stress Indicator had 89 6-point Likert scale items relating to job stressors and ways of coping with stress. The Short Form-12 questionnaire consisted of 12 Likert scale items for the physical and mental health aspects of the officers (Greco & Fischetti, 2018).

The results of the test showed significant differences between the officers and the representative sample of the Italian male population for several of the subscales of the Occupational Stress Indicator and portions of the Short Form-12. In all subscales, the police officers had lower scores than the representative Italian male population and statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.0001$ ) for sections on intrinsic factors on the job, management role, relationship with others, career and achievement, organizational structure and climate, and home/work interface (Greco & Fischetti, 2018). The study showed even though police work is very stressful, police officers perceive less stress than the general population. Greco and Fischetti (2018) surmised the results of the study may be due to a greater resiliency to stress as well as continuing education and training such as physical training, shooting drills, and self-defense techniques. Physical, tactical, and technical training repeated throughout an officer's career "could play an important role in providing strategies to prevent and manage stress and maintain a state of physical and mental well-being, fundamental conditions to improve the quality of life and physical and working efficiency of police officers" (Greco & Fischetti, 2018, p. 559).

Though the sample was small for this study, the results showed adequate training in all aspects of law enforcement may allow officers to thrive better in the workplace.

### **Officer Resilience**

In high-stress occupations, such as law enforcement, resilience can improve the ability to adapt to stress and have a positive effect on health and risk factors (Christopher et al., 2020). Resiliency allows officers to adapt and overcome in critical incident exposures. The coping skills and level of resiliency varies among officers. Those with higher levels of training and experience may be more resilient (Malmin, 2013). Officer resilience can be defined as “the capacity to prepare for, recover from, and adapt in the face of stress, adversity, trauma, or challenge” (Ramey & Markovic, 2016).

Gutshall et al. (2017) conducted a study of the effects of occupational stress on a police officer’s cognitive performance and memory. Police officers are faced with numerous stressors and the “increasing demand of politics, public perception, crime, and terrorist attacks” (Gutshall et al., 2017, p. 463). Officers must face the demands of law enforcement with a calm demeanor and have the wherewithal to remember minute details for documentation purposes. Gutshall et al. (2017) hypothesized higher levels of resilience to stress and empathy, as well as better quality sleep and low perceived stress, would be correlated with higher scores on memory recall tests. Higher levels of burnout, perceived stress, and levels of dissociative states were hypothesized to correlate with lower scores on memory recall tests. During Gutshall et al.’s (2017) study, 25 South Florida police officers completed six assessments and a memory recall test during two different collection points which were 10 days apart. Data from other memory tests and psychological assessment-test assessments were analyzed and compared with the results from the police officers’ assessments. The six assessments used during the study were the Toronto

Empathy Questionnaire, the Conner-Davidson Resilience Scale, the Perceived Stress Scale, the Dissociative State Scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Human Services, and the Pittsburg Sleep Quality Index. The Rey Osterreith Complex Figure memory test was administered as well to study at the officers' memory recall abilities (Gutshall et al., 2017).

One of the unanticipated findings by Gutshall et al. (2017) was an improvement in memory recall under more stressful situations. Gutshall et al. (2017) surmised stress may not always be negative and “training that incorporates stress ‘inoculation’ events, may result in improved operation performance of officers, especially those with less experience, or those under acute, and prolonged periods of stress in the field” (p. 471). Gutshall et al.’s (2017) findings support Greco and Fischetti’s (2018) call for better officer training. The results of the Resilience to Stress survey reported by the officers showed the officers to be in the upper percentile assessment, 31 – 33.2 between the base level survey and test day survey, indicating high resilience to stress. Officers with 0 – 14 years of experience showed higher levels of resiliency compared to those with over 14 years experience. Inadequate coping skills, such as alcohol abuse and avoidance behaviors, may be more frequently used by veteran officers leading to lower levels of resilience. Resilience can affect psychological, physiological, and behavioral processes for law enforcement officers (Christopher et al., 2020). Despite the small sample studied, Gutshall et al.’s (2017) research is vital in outlining the importance of officer resilience in the workplace.

### **Summary**

Thriving in law enforcement is more than surviving. Thriving is a combination of well-being, resilience, and flourishing in the workplace (Dimitrova, 2020; Schreiner et al., 2009). Using Seligman’s (2011) well-being theory as the theoretical framework, positive emotion,

engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment all relate to the potential aspects of thriving for law enforcement. The seven potential aspects of thriving for law enforcement according to the research are sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). A sense of purpose refers to occupational pride, a calling, meaning, or fulfillment to work in law enforcement. A sense of purpose can be directly linked to job satisfaction (Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). Social support is a network of work-related or personal supports for law enforcement officers. Vig et al.'s (2020) study showed higher levels of perceived social support was associated with lower odds of screening positive for PTSD and MDD. Spirituality is defined in a belief in a power beyond oneself, specifically God. Spirituality is important for many officers and may relate to a sense of purpose when seeking work in law enforcement. Spirituality in law enforcement can also correlate with positive inner growth and help mitigate stress (Charles et al., 2014).

Lack of administrative support and inadequate training are two organizational stressors found in law enforcement (Duran et al., 2018; Greco & Fischetti, 2018). Without administrative support, officers may feel unimportant, neglected, overworked, and undervalued (Duran et al., 2018). Effective training, including continued education, physical, tactical, and technical training, can reduce stress and help improve the quality of life for police officers (Greco & Fischetti, 2018). Maintaining physical health can relate to adequate training but includes more than exercise. Maintaining physical health also refers to receiving quality sleep, choosing a balanced diet, and having a healthy balance between work and life. Regular exercise showed to have the strongest relative direct effect on an officer's well-being but a balanced diet, and quality

sleep were also significant factors (Baker et al., 2020). Finally, officer resilience can refer to the ability of an officer to adapt and overcome to workplace stressors and critical incidents.

Resiliency can affect all aspects of an officer's health and well-being. High resiliency in stressful situations can increase memory recall and cognitive performance (Gutshall et al., 2017).

The literature review introduced the seven potential elements for thriving in law enforcement include: a sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). Chapter Three identifies the research methodology to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. Chapter Three also explains the method for determining which of the seven potential elements, to include a sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience, may relate to officer thriving (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020).

### III. METHODOLOGY

Chapter III contains a reporting of the methodology used in the study. The focus of the survey was to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. Based on the research, the seven potential dimensions for thriving in law enforcement included a sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). The study also examined the demographics of the participants in the study to determine among participant gender, education level, job assignment, or years of experience was there was a statistically significant effect for these variables. The data were analyzed to determine which of the seven dimensions of thriving is most associated and predictive of law enforcement officers' perceptions of overall thriving. Finally, the data were analyzed to determine which was more predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving – personal thriving or professional thriving.

#### **Description of Methodology**

The study was non-experimental and quantitative using descriptive, cross-sectional survey research by specific research methodology. The sample for the study was convenient, non-probable, and purposive. Only sworn law enforcement officers from one county in the State of Florida were asked to participate. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the degree to

which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving, where thriving is defined as well-being, resilience, and flourishing. The seven potential elements focused on for the study were a sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience.

## **Research Context**

A workforce crisis currently exists for law enforcement agencies (Linos, 2018; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Recruitment and retention of officers is key for law enforcement agencies to continue to function safely and effectively. Thriving is a combination of well-being, resilience, and flourishing in the workplace. Identifying aspects of thriving for officers could assist with recruitment and retention for law enforcement agencies. More research on what supports law enforcement officers in thriving in the workplace was necessary.

## **Participants**

The sample for the study was accessed in a convenient, non-probable, and purposive manner. Only sworn law enforcement officers from one county in the State of Florida were asked to participate. The sample of study participants consisted of approximately 620 sworn law enforcement officers employed at a large law enforcement agency located in central Florida. The law enforcement officers were emailed an invitation to complete the survey through SoGoSurvey (see Appendix A for the participation form/voluntary consent for the online survey).

## **Instrument**

The study's researcher-constructed survey instrument (Appendix B) was initially used in a pilot study for validation purposes. The study's research instrument consisted of four demographic questions and 25 5-point Likert scale items in which one (1) represented the strongest disagreement with the item and five (5) represented the strongest agreement with the

item. The research instrument was created based upon the research studies on the seven potential dimensions of thriving in law enforcement: sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). This study's survey instrument (Appendix B) was initially used in a pilot study to determine internal consistency and emailed to 30 law enforcement officers within a large county agency in the State of Florida using SoGoSurvey.

The internal consistency of the sample responses ( $n = 21$ ) in the pilot study was excellent ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Cronbach's alpha is a common measure of scale reliability and .70 is considered an acceptable value. For psychological constructs, values below .70 may be expected due to the diversity of the constructs being measured in the instrument (Field, 2018). Lower values may be expected; however, the researcher-constructed survey instrument ( $\alpha = .90$  ;  $p < .001$ ) exceeded the expected reliability level ( $\alpha = .70$ ). No changes were made to the piloted survey and the survey results from the piloted survey were included in the data analysis.

### **Research Questions**

This study's topic and research problem were addressed through the statement of the following research questions:

1. To what degree do study participants perceive themselves as thriving?
2. Considering study participant gender, education level, job assignment, and years of experience, was there a statistically significant effect for these variables?

3. Considering the seven dimensions of thriving identified in the study, which is the most associated with and predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving?
4. Considering personal and professional thriving, which is the most predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving?

## **Procedures**

Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board approved the study as an exempt status study. The study's researcher-constructed survey instrument was reviewed by the Chief of the law enforcement agency. Permission was granted to conduct the research within the law enforcement agency. SoGoSurvey was utilized to disseminate the online survey via agency email to the approximately 620 law enforcement officers. The initial email contained the study overview, the voluntary informed consent, and a link to the SoGoSurvey. The participants were assured of the privacy of the answers provided in the survey.

After seven days, a reminder email was sent that thanked those who participated and asked those who had not completed the survey to do so if they wished. After seven more days, a second reminder email was sent providing those who wished to voluntarily complete the survey an additional three days to do so. After three days, the link was disabled so as not to accept any further survey results. The data were analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 (George & Mallery, 2020; Field, 2018) and the data housed and secured on a password-protected computer stored in a locked office.

To address the research questions, descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used. The probability level of  $p \leq .05$  represented the threshold level for findings considered

statistically significant. Numeric effect sizes achieved in the study's analyses were interpreted using the conventions of Cohen (1988) and Sawilowsky (2009).

### ***Preliminary Analysis***

The study's demographic identifier variables were evaluated using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequencies ( $n$ ), measures of central tendency (mean scores), variability (minimum/maximum; standard deviations), standard errors of the mean ( $SE_M$ ), and measures of data normality (skew, kurtosis) represented the primary descriptive statistical techniques used to evaluate the study's select scale-level variables associated with the construct of thriving. A preliminary data analysis was conducted to check for missing data and completion rate. The internal reliability of study participant response to survey items represented on the research instrument was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) statistical technique (Cortina, 1993; Field, 2018).

### ***Research Question 1***

To address the first research question, descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were utilized. The statistical significance of study participant mean score response to perceptions of thriving was assessed using the one sample  $t$ -test. The assumption of normality associated with the use of the one sample  $t$ -test was addressed through the interpretation of the respective skew and kurtosis values for overall thriving.

### ***Research Question 2***

Research question two involved the use of between-subjects analytic techniques to address comparisons of effect exerted by the four demographic identifier variables upon perceptions of thriving. The four demographic topics were participant gender, education level, years of experience, and job assignment.

### ***Research Question 3***

For the third research question, a two-phase modeling process was used. During the first phase, all seven dimensions of thriving were correlated with perceptions of overall thriving. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to evaluate the mathematical relationship between the seven dimensions of thriving and overall perceptions of thriving. In the second phase of the modeling process, the multiple linear regression (MLR) statistical technique was used to evaluate the predictive abilities of the four most prominent dimensions of thriving identified in the first phase of the modeling process.

### ***Research Question 4***

Research question four used multiple linear regression (MLR) to address the predictive viability of the two independent predictor variables: the dimensions of professional thriving and personal thriving.

## **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. A review of the literature showed seven potential dimensions of thriving in law enforcement: sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). The seven potential dimensions were used to create the survey for thriving in law enforcement. The study's researcher-constructed survey instrument (Appendix B) was initially used in a pilot study and internal consistency was high ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The unmodified survey was then emailed to 620 law enforcement officers and the results

of the data were analyzed. The findings achieved in the study are formally reported in Chapter IV of the study.

## IV. RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. Based on the research, the seven potential dimensions for thriving in law enforcement included a sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). The data were analyzed to determine which of the seven dimensions of thriving is most associated and predictive of law enforcement officers' perceptions of overall thriving. The study also examined the demographics of the participants in the study to determine if participant gender, education level, years of experience, or job assignment to determine if there was a statistically significant effect for these variables. Finally, the data were analyzed to determine which was more predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving: personal thriving or professional thriving.

The study's topic was addressed through a non-experimental, quantitative research design. A survey research approach represented the study's specific research methodology. The study's sample of participants was accessed through a non-probability, convenient/purposive sampling technique. Four research questions were formally posed to address the study's topic and problem statement. The study's final, actionable sample of participants was 214. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyze study data. The analysis of data and the

reporting of study finding were conducted using IBM’s Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 (George & Mallery, 2020; Field, 2018).

### **Preliminary Descriptive Statistical Findings**

#### **Missing Data/Completion Rate**

The study’s response arrays within survey items were assessed for missing data using descriptive statistical techniques. As a result, the study’s extent of missing data was considered minimal at 0.71% ( $n = 35$ ), reflecting a 99.29% survey item completion rate. Missing data at the person level was considered minimal at 0.81% ( $n = 7$ ) and well below the acceptable threshold level of 30% proposed by Newman (2014).

#### **Internal Reliability**

The internal reliability of study participant response to survey items represented on the research instrument was assessed using the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) statistical technique (Cortina, 1993; Field, 2018). The internal reliability achieved in the study was considered very good to excellent using the conventions of interpretation espoused by George and Mallery (2020). Table 1 contains a summary of the findings for the internal reliability of study participant response.

**Table 1**

*Internal Reliability: Thriving*

Scale	No. of Items	$\alpha$	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Thriving	23	0.88	0.86	0.90

*Note.* The lower and upper bounds of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were calculated using a 95% confidence interval.

The study’s demographic identifier variables were evaluated using frequencies ( $n$ ) and percentages (%) as the primary descriptive statistical analysis. Table 2 contains a summary of these findings.

**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics: Demographic Identifier Variables*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	37	17.29	17.29
Male	177	82.71	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<b>Job Assignment</b>			
Patrol	110	51.40	51.40
Sworn Officer (Other)	102	47.66	99.07
Missing	2	0.93	100.00
<b>Education Level</b>			
High School	63	29.44	29.44
Undergraduate Degree	97	45.33	74.77
Graduate Degree	53	24.77	99.53
Missing	1	0.47	100.00
<b>Years of Experience</b>			
9 Years and Less	70	32.71	32.71
10 Years to 19 Years	65	30.37	63.08
20 Years or More	75	35.05	98.13
Missing	4	1.87	100.00

The study's variables associated with the construct of thriving were evaluated using the following descriptive statistical techniques: frequencies (*n*), measures of central tendency (mean scores), variability (minimum/maximum; standard deviations), standard errors of the mean ( $SE_M$ ), and measures of data normality (skew, kurtosis). These primary descriptive statistical techniques were used to evaluate the study's select scale-level variables associated with the construct of thriving. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics associated with the dimensions of thriving: social support, administrative support, sense of purpose, spirituality, effective training, resilience, and physical well-being.

**Table 3***Descriptive Statistics: Dimensions of Thriving*

Dimension	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SE<sub>M</sub></i>	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Support	4.41	0.52	209	0.04	2.60	5.00	-0.85	0.19
Administrative Support	4.19	0.93	211	0.06	1.00	5.00	-1.30	1.42
Sense of Purpose	4.29	0.73	210	0.05	1.67	5.00	-0.94	0.61
Spirituality	4.03	0.91	204	0.06	1.00	5.00	-0.97	0.67
Training	4.17	0.77	213	0.05	1.00	5.00	-1.00	1.23
Resilience	4.24	0.68	213	0.05	1.67	5.00	-0.82	0.57
Physical Well-Being	3.60	0.84	212	0.06	1.00	5.00	-0.28	-0.24

Table 4 contains a summary of the descriptive statistical analyses associated with the study's select scale-level variables associated with thriving.

**Table 4***Descriptive Statistics: Thriving; Dimensions of Thriving*

Thriving	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SE<sub>M</sub></i>	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Professional	4.15	0.81	214	0.06	2.00	5.00	-0.61	-0.39
Personal	4.14	0.86	214	0.06	1.00	5.00	-1.04	1.14
Overall	4.16	0.48	192	0.03	2.61	5.00	-0.63	-0.04

### Data Analysis by Research Question

The study's research questions were addressed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The probability level of  $p \leq .05$  represented the threshold level for findings considered as statistically significant. Numeric effect sizes achieved in the study's analyses were interpreted using the conventions of Cohen (1988) and Sawilowsky (2009). The following represents the results of the findings for each research question.

## Research Question 1

To what degree do study participants perceive themselves as thriving?

### *Analysis*

Research question one was addressed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The statistical significance of study participant mean score response to perceptions of thriving was assessed using the one sample *t*-test. The assumption of normality associated with the use of the one sample *t*-test was addressed through the interpretation of the respective skew and kurtosis values for overall thriving.

### *Findings*

The skew value of -0.63 and kurtosis value of -0.04 were well-within the  $\pm 2.0$  value for skew and  $\pm 7.0$  value for kurtosis established for data normality proposed by George and Mallery (2020). As a result, the assumption of normality was satisfied for the use of the one sample *t*-test for statistical significance testing purposes.

A study participant mean score response of 4.16 ( $SD = 0.48$ ) for perceptions of thriving was manifested at a statistically significant level ( $t_{(191)} = 33.70$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The magnitude of effect for study participant response to perceptions of thriving was considered huge ( $d = 2.43$ ). Table 5 contains a summary of the findings for the evaluation of study participant perceptions of thriving.

**Table 5**

#### *Perceptions of Overall Thriving*

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\mu$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Thriving	4.16	0.48	3	33.70	< .001	2.43

*Note.* Degrees of freedom for the *t*-statistic = 191. *d* represents Cohen's *d*.

## Research Question 2

Considering study participant gender, education level, job assignment, and years of experience, was there a statistically significant effect for these variables?

## *Analysis*

Research question two involved the use of between-subjects analytic techniques to address any statistically significant effect exerted by the four demographic identifier variables upon perceptions of thriving.

## *Findings*

The following represents the formal reporting of effect for perceptions of thriving by respective demographic identifier variable.

**Gender.** The *t*-test of independent means was used to assess the statistical significance of the comparison of effect for perceptions of thriving by gender of study participant. As a result, the mean score favoring female study participants (0.12) was manifested at a non-statistically significant level ( $t_{(190)} = 1.44, p = .15$ ), indicating that perceptions of thriving were not significantly different between the female and male study participants. The effect for the comparison of perceptions of thriving by study participant gender was considered small ( $d = .28$ ). The results of the analysis for gender effect upon perceptions of thriving are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

### *Perceptions of Thriving Comparison by Gender of Study Participant*

Variable	Female		Male		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Thriving	4.26	0.43	4.14	0.48	1.44	.15	0.28

*Note.*  $N = 192$ . Degrees of freedom for the *t*-statistic = 190. *d* represents Cohen's *d*.

**Job Assignment.** The *t*-test of independent means was used to assess the statistical significance of the comparison of effect for perceptions of thriving by job assignment of study participant. As a result, the mean score favoring study participants identified as patrol officers was manifested at a non-statistically significant level ( $t_{(188)} = 0.79, p = .43$ ), indicating that

perceptions of thriving were not significantly different between study participants identified as patrol officers and those in other sworn capacities. The effect for the comparison of perceptions of thriving by study participant position was considered small ( $d = .12$ ) and the results of that analysis are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Perceptions of Thriving Comparison by Job Assignment (Patrol Officer & Other Sworn Officers)*

Variable	Patrol		Sworn Officer (Other)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Thriving	4.18	0.48	4.13	0.47	0.79	.43	0.12

*Note.*  $N = 190$ . Degrees of freedom for the *t*-statistic = 188. *d* represents Cohen's *d*.

**Education Level.** A 1 x 3 ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effect of study participant education level upon perceptions of thriving. As a result, the finding for the effect exerted by study participant educational level upon perceptions of thriving was non-statistically significant ( $F(2, 188) = 0.08, p = .92$ ), indicating the differences in thriving among the levels of education level were all similar (Table 8). The main effect for education level was non-statistically significant ( $F(2, 188) = 0.08, p = .92$ ), indicating there were no statistically significant differences of thriving by study participant education level.

**Table 8**

*Analysis of Variance Table for Thriving by Education Level*

Term	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Education Level	0.04	2	0.08	.92	0.00
Residuals	43.22	188			

The means and standard deviations for the 1 x 3 ANOVA analysis for study participant educational level are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9***Mean, Standard Deviation, and Sample Size for Thriving by Education Level*

Educational Level	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
High School	4.15	0.52	56
Undergraduate Degree	4.17	0.47	86
Graduate Degree	4.14	0.45	49

**Years of Experience.** A 1 x 3 ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effect of study years of experience upon perceptions of thriving. As a result, the finding for the effect exerted by study participant years of experience upon perceptions of thriving was non-statistically significant ( $F(2, 185) = 1.88, p = .16$ ), indicating the differences in thriving among the levels of years of experience were all similar (Table 10). The main effect for study participant years of experience was non-statistically significant ( $F(2, 185) = 1.88, p = .16$ ), indicating there were no statistically significant differences of thriving by study participant years of experience.

**Table 10***Effect for Thriving by Study Participant Years of Experience*

Term	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Years of Experience	0.79	2	1.88	.16	0.02
Residuals	38.78	185			

The means and standard deviations for the 1 x 3 ANOVA analysis for study participant years of experience are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11***Mean, Standard Deviation, and Sample Size for Thriving by Years of Experience*

Combination	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
9 Years and Less	4.21	0.48	62
10 Years to 19 Years	4.22	0.39	59
20 Years or More	4.08	0.49	67

### Research Question 3

Considering the seven dimensions of thriving identified in the study, which was most predictive of study participant overall perceptions of thriving?

#### *Analysis*

Research question three was addressed through a two-phase modeling process. In the first phase, all seven dimensions of thriving were correlated with perceptions of overall thriving. Dimensions of thriving considered to be strong correlates ( $r \geq .60$ ) were identified for use in the phase two predictive modeling process.

**Phase I.** The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to evaluate the mathematical relationship between the seven dimensions of thriving and overall perceptions of thriving. As a result, four dimension of thriving reflected strong mathematical relationships with study participant perceptions of overall thriving. Table 12 contains a summary of findings for the evaluation of mathematical relationships between dimensions of thriving and perceptions of overall thriving.

**Table 12**

*Relationship of Dimensions of Thriving with Study Participant Overall Perceptions of Thriving*

Dimension	$r_p$	95% CI	$p$
Social Support	0.73	[0.66, 0.79]	< .001
Administrative Support	0.58	[0.47, 0.66]	< .001
Sense of Purpose	0.69	[0.60, 0.75]	< .001
Spirituality	0.65	[0.56, 0.72]	< .001
Training	0.71	[0.64, 0.78]	< .001
Physical Well-Being	0.52	[0.41, 0.62]	< .001

**Phase II.** In the second phase of the modeling process featured in research question three, the multiple linear regression (MLR) statistical technique was used to evaluate the

predictive abilities of the four prominent dimensions of thriving obtained in the first phase of the modeling process. The predictive model was statistically significant ( $F(4,187) = 319.90, p < .001, R^2 = 0.87$ ), indicating that approximately 87% of the variance in overall perceptions of thriving is explainable by the thriving dimensions of social support, effective training, spirituality, and sense of purpose. Social support was significantly predictive of overall thriving ( $B = 0.34, t_{(187)} = 11.59, p < .001$ ), indicating that, on average, a one-unit increase of social support will increase the value of overall thriving by 0.34 units. Sense of purpose was also a statistically significant predictor of overall thriving ( $B = 0.15, t_{(187)} = 7.20, p < .001$ ), indicating that, as a general rule, a one-unit increase of sense of purpose will increase the value of overall thriving by 0.15 units.

Spirituality was also a significant predictor of overall thriving ( $B = 0.15, t_{(187)} = 9.63, p < .001$ ), indicating that, generally, a one-unit increase of spirituality will increase the value of overall thriving by 0.15 units. Effective training was also a statistically significant predictor for overall thriving ( $B = 0.23, t_{(187)} = 12.00, p < .001$ ), indicating that, on average, a one-unit increase of effective training will increase the value of overall thriving by 0.23 units.

Although all four dimensions of thriving were robust, statistically significant predictors of overall thriving, the dimensions of social support and effective training were the most prominent predictors of overall thriving considering respective unstandardized  $\beta$  values, standard  $\beta$  values, and predictive slope values ( $t$ ).

Table 13 contains a summary of the findings for the predictive model used in research question three.

**Table 13***Predicting Overall Thriving by Dimensions of Thriving*

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	0.48	0.11	[0.26, 0.70]	0.00	4.30	< .001
Social Support	0.34	0.03	[0.28, 0.39]	0.36	11.59	< .001
Sense of Purpose	0.15	0.02	[0.11, 0.19]	0.23	7.20	< .001
Spirituality	0.15	0.02	[0.12, 0.18]	0.29	9.63	< .001
Effective Training	0.23	0.02	[0.19, 0.26]	0.37	12.00	< .001

**Research Question 4**

Considering the two dimensions of thriving identified in the study, which is most predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving?

***Analysis***

The multiple linear regression (MLR) statistical technique was used to address the predictive viability of the two independent variables (professional thriving and personal thriving) represented in the model.

***Findings***

The predictive model was statistically significant ( $F_{(2,189)} = 59.45, p < .001, R^2 = 0.39$ ), indicating that approximately 39% of the variance in perceptions of thriving is explainable by the two dimensions of thriving professionally and thriving personally. Professional thriving predicted overall thriving in a statistically significant manner ( $B = 0.17, t_{(189)} = 3.81, p < .001$ ), indicating that, collectively, a one-unit increase of professional thriving will increase the value of overall thriving by 0.17 units. Personal thriving also predicted overall thriving in a statistically significant manner ( $B = 0.22, t_{(189)} = 5.11, p < .001$ ), indicating that, on average, a one-unit increase of personal thriving will increase the value of overall thriving by 0.22 units. Although

both professional and personal thriving were statistically significant predictors of the perception of overall thriving, the perception of personal thriving was slightly more robust in predicting overall thriving based on the comparison of respective unstandardized ( $B$ ) and standardized ( $\beta$ ) weights as well as predictive slope values ( $t$ ). Table 14 contains a summary of the predictive model findings for research question four.

**Table 14**

*Predicting Overall Perceptions of Thriving: Professional & Personal Thriving*

Model	$B$	$SE$	95% CI	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
(Intercept)	2.56	0.15	[2.26, 2.85]	0.00	16.99	< .001
Professional Thriving	0.17	0.04	[0.08, 0.26]	0.29	3.81	< .001
Personal Thriving	0.22	0.04	[0.13, 0.30]	0.39	5.11	< .001

### Summary

The formal reporting of the study findings was presented in Chapter IV. Exceptional levels of survey completion rate and internal reliability were achieved in the study and, statistically, the study was sufficiently powered with a participant sample of 214. A statistically significant level of study participant perceptions of thriving was manifested in research question one. The effect for thriving did not vary at a statistically significant level in the analysis of each of the study's four demographic identifier variables. Study participant perceptions of professional and personal thriving were, in a statistically significant manner, predictive of perceptions of overall thriving. Study participant perceptions of personal thriving exerted a slightly greater degree of predictive effect for perceptions of overall thriving. Chapter V contains a thorough discussion of the findings achieved in the study as reported in Chapter IV.

## V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. Seven potential dimensions for thriving in law enforcement were identified in the professional literature: a sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). A non-experimental, quantitative research design, using descriptive, cross-sectional survey research by specific research methodology, was used to address the topic of the study.

### **Summary of Results**

The sample for the study was accessed in a convenient, non-probable, and purposive manner. Only sworn law enforcement officers from one county in the State of Florida were identified and encouraged to participate in the study. This study's research instrument consisted of four demographic questions and 25 5-point Likert scale items in which 1 represented the strongest disagreement with the item and 5 represented the strongest agreement with the item. The research instrument was created through a thorough analysis of the professional literature, subsequently basing the construction of the survey items upon the research studies of the seven potential dimensions of thriving in law enforcement: sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, effective training, maintaining physical health, administrative support, and officer

resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). Study participants were emailed an invitation to complete the survey through SoGoSurvey (see Appendix B for the survey). The pilot survey was emailed to 30 law enforcement officers, with 21 officers completing the piloted version of the survey. The internal consistency of the response to the pilot version of the survey ( $n = 21$ ) was considered excellent ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The internal reliability level achieved using the study's researcher-constructed survey instrument exceeded the expected level of acceptability of  $\alpha = .70$ . Following the pilot survey, 620 law enforcement officers were emailed the researcher-constructed survey using a link from SoGoSurvey. A total of 214 participants completed the online survey, including the 21 participants from the pilot survey. The data were analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 (George & Mallery, 2020; Field, 2018).

The study's response arrays within survey items were assessed for missing data using descriptive statistical techniques. As a result, the study's extent of missing data was considered minimal at 0.71% ( $n = 35$ ), reflecting a 99.29% survey item completion rate. The internal reliability achieved in the study was considered very good to excellent using the conventions of interpretation espoused by George and Mallery (2020). The study's demographic identifier variables were evaluated using descriptive statistical techniques. By gender, 177 males and 37 females participated in the survey. For job assignment, 110 participants were assigned as road patrol and 102 were other sworn officers such as detectives and specialty units while two participants chose not to answer the job assignment demographic question. The majority of participants ( $n = 97$ ) possessed an undergraduate degree. Sixty-three participants possessed a high school diploma, 53 participants held a master's degree or higher, and one participant chose

not to answer the question. The years of experience for each participant were relatively evenly distributed. Seventy participants were identified within the “nine years or less of experience” category, 65 participants identified as occupying the “10 and 19 years of experience” category, and 75 participants were identified with the category of “20 or more years of experience.” Four participants did not answer the years of service question. Slightly over eight in 10 (82.7%) were identified as male by gender. The extreme skewing of study participants for gender was not unexpected as women traditionally account for approximately 12% of law enforcement officers in local and state departments across the nation (Yu, 2021).

### **Discussion by Research Question**

The research questions for this study were addressed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The probability level of  $p \leq .05$  represented the threshold level for findings considered as statistically significant. Numeric effect sizes achieved in the study’s analyses were interpreted using the conventions of Cohen (1988) and Sawilowsky (2009).

#### **Research Question 1**

To what degree do study participants perceive themselves as thriving? To address the first research question, descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were utilized. The statistical significance of study participant mean score response to perceptions of thriving was assessed using the one sample *t*-test and the assumption of normality associated with the use of the one sample *t*-test was addressed through the interpretation of the respective skew and kurtosis values for overall thriving. The mean score response for participants’ perceptions of thriving was statistically significant ( $t_{(191)} = 33.70; p < .001$ ), and the effect was considered huge ( $d = 2.43$ ).

The results of the first research question indicate law enforcement officers are thriving, which is a crucial finding. In the current climate of the United States, many law enforcement

agencies are facing backlash from the community and its calls for defunding and an increasing number of officers are leaving the workforce (Marier & Moule Jr., 2019; PERF, 2019). The findings of numerous studies on the topic are largely reflective of the degree to which law enforcement officers suffer from burnout, poor well-being, and high stress (Birch et al., 2017; Christopher et al., 2020; Hesketh et al., 2016; Santa Maria et al., 2019). No studies regarding law enforcement officers' thriving have been identified within the professional literature to date. The positive nature of the results depicting law enforcement officers as thriving in the workplace is unexpected and encouraging. Law enforcement agencies recruiting new officers may perhaps use this finding to illustrate the noteworthy extent to which officers are able to thrive in their workplace. Other law enforcement agencies found to have thriving officers can also consider recruiting from agencies where officers are currently unhappy or faced with defunding issues. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has proposed a \$5,000 law enforcement recruitment bonus to encourage officers from other states to apply in Florida where police are supported by the government (Ron Desantis: 46<sup>th</sup> Governor of Florida, 2021). The benefit of recruiting current officers into a thriving environment is two-fold: the officers will have some training and experience and they will most likely be more productive in an environment that promotes and reinforces thriving. The results of this study emphasize how some law enforcement officers from a large county agency in the State of Florida are not just surviving – those officers are thriving.

## **Research Question 2**

Was there an effect for study participant gender, education level, job assignment, and years of experience upon perceptions of overall thriving? Research question two involved the use of between-subjects analytic techniques to address comparisons of effect exerted by the four

demographic identifier variables upon perceptions of thriving. The data showed no significant difference by gender, job assignment, education level, or years of experience.

This finding of no significant difference by gender, job assignment, education level, or years of experience is important because it shows thriving was represented by all variables in a fairly equal manner. The findings are positive in that thriving did not favor one group or another demographically but were still robust by variable. Females in the sample were found to be thriving slightly more than their male counterparts, but not enough to be significant. The job assignment, whether patrol or a specialty position in a sworn capacity, had no bearing on thriving in the workplace. The years of experience on the job was not indicative of thriving for law enforcement and the statistical non-significance is a noteworthy finding because many officers become burnt out during their careers. Officers just starting their careers ( $M = 4.21$ ) and those with 10-19 years on the job ( $M = 4.22$ ) had very similar perceptions of thriving. Study participants on the job over 20 years ( $M = 4.08$ ) perceived themselves as thriving at a level slightly less than participants in the other categories, but not at a statistically significant level.

Finally, the education level for the study participants was not statistically significant for thriving in the workplace. The standard deviation for the education levels was between 0.45 and 0.52 for each group (high school, undergraduate degree, and graduate degree). The mean was between 4.14 and 4.17 for the groups, indicating a very minimal the difference. Most of the participants held an undergraduate degree ( $n = 86$ ); however, those with a high school diploma ( $n = 56$ ) and those with a graduate degree ( $n = 49$ ) were both well represented. In the agency where the study was conducted, a graduate degree is necessary for promotion. However, surprisingly, this requirement did not appear to affect thriving for those participants holding a high school diploma or undergraduate degree.

The non-statistically significant findings for the comparisons of thriving by demographic identifier variable is both positive and promising. Perceptions of thriving were robust for study participants, regardless of their gender, years of experience, and educational level. The finding would appear to validate the research site's commitment to fostering a motivated, resilient, and even thriving cadre of employees.

### **Research Question 3**

Considering the seven dimensions of thriving identified in the study, which was most predictive of study participant overall perceptions of thriving? Research question three was addressed through a two-phase modeling process. For the first phase of the modeling process, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to evaluate the mathematical relationship between the seven dimensions of thriving and overall perceptions of thriving. As a result, four dimensions of thriving reflected strong mathematical relationships with study participant perceptions of overall thriving: social support, effective training, spirituality, and sense of purpose. For the second phase, the multiple linear regression (MLR) statistical technique was used to evaluate the predictive abilities of the four prominent dimensions of thriving obtained in the first phase of the modeling process. All four dimensions of thriving were robust, statistically significant predictors of overall thriving; however, the dimensions of social support and effective training were the most prominent predictors of overall thriving.

It is unsurprising that the dimension of social support is a key factor in thriving for law enforcement. Social support was found in several studies to be important for mental health in law enforcement officers (Clifton et al., 2018; Feldman et al., 2020). The findings of previous studies are corroborative of social support as a coping mechanism or a way to prevent depression or PTSD (Clifton et al., 2018; Feldman et al., 2020). Social support was perceived not as a deterrent

for mental health issues but more as a means to promote thriving for law enforcement in the current study. Social support was more predictive of thriving than all other factors studied. The importance of peer or social support on an officer's wellness and psyche cannot be underestimated (Clifton et al., 2018).

Effective training was the second most predictive aspect of thriving in law enforcement. Officers who perceived the training they received within the agency as effective were more likely to thrive. Ineffective training was listed as an organizational stressor in previous studies (Christopher et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2018; Gutshall et al., 2017). It is, therefore, predictable that effective training would promote thriving in the workplace. Effective training that caters to the variety of sworn officer positions may help law enforcement agencies with retention.

Seligman's (2011) well-being theory, the framework for this study, is reinforced by the study's findings of the top four factors in thriving: social support, effective training, spirituality, and sense of purpose. The second building block for Seligman's (2011) theory is engagement which involves doing an activity for its own reward and using one's skills, attention, or strengths to work on a challenge. Effective training requires the officer to use skill, attention, and physical or mental strength. Relationships are the third building block of Seligman's (2011) well-being theory. Social support refers to the relationships with others and is a key element in well-being and thriving. Spirituality, sense of purpose, and Seligman's (2011) fourth building block of meaning are all associated. Meaning, in the well-being theory, refers to serving and belonging to something bigger than oneself. According to Seligman (2011), some of the benefits of well-being include less burnout, fewer sleep problems, better performance at work, better self-control, less depression and anxiety, and better physical health.

#### **Research Question 4**

Considering the two dimensions of thriving identified in the study, which is most predictive of study participant perceptions of overall thriving? The multiple linear regression (MLR) statistical technique was used to address the predictive viability of the two independent variables, professional thriving and personal thriving, represented in the model. Both professional and personal thriving were found to be statistically significant. Personal thriving was found to be slightly more robust ( $B = 0.22$ ) than professional thriving ( $B = 0.17$ ).

It is not unexpected, in this current social and political climate with community calls for police defunding and public backlash against law enforcement, that law enforcement officers may find themselves thriving more in their personal lives rather than the workplace (Marier & Moule Jr., 2019). Police officers still must cope with constant workplace stressors and burnout (Gordijn et al., 2017). It is worth noting, despite current hardships for law enforcement, both personal and professional thriving were statistically significant. As mentioned previously, thriving for law enforcement is not a guarantee in certain areas of the nation such as Missouri or Washington states where open hostility for police has led to low officer morale and disengagement (Marier & Moule Jr., 2019). The current study vitally illustrates that thriving is feasible for law enforcement officers.

#### **Study Limitations**

Law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving, both personally and professionally. Despite the positive results achieved in the study, some limitations were evident in conducting the study. The current study was only conducted with one large local county agency in the State of Florida. No state or federal agencies were involved nor were any smaller local agencies, and while civil unrest and calls for police defunding have occurred throughout the

country, the same issues do not plague the area where the study was conducted (Berlatsky, 2020). The agency used in the study has strong community support, has not had any layoffs or reduction of police forces, and has experienced no major protests or riots regarding police brutality or maleficence. Other law enforcement officers in the United States may have a much different outlook regarding thriving in the workplace due to the current political and social climate. This study also only looked at certain demographics. Race, age, specialized training, and officer rank were not considered. As a result, the generalization of the study's findings is limited to the population from which was accessed.

The study was also delimited to a quantitative, non-experimental research design. Although the design and methodology provided the opportunity to gather a significant amount of data on the study's topic, the information achieved was rigid and fixed considering the closed structured nature of the Likert-type research instrument that was used to secure participant perceptions on the study's topic. The non-experimental research design approach was, moreover, limiting in terms of generalizability of study findings.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

Law enforcement agencies striving to recruit and retain officers might view this study as a tool to promote a greater degree of understanding as to what areas are most important for thriving to occur. Since the dimensions of social support and effective training were the most prominent predictors of overall thriving in the study, law enforcement agencies may want to concentrate more resources on those areas. Encouraging officers, both new and veteran, to adopt a strong social support network is key to thriving in law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies can also set up activities to promote social support including family days, team building exercises, and outside-of-work activities that promote healthy social interaction.

Effective training was the other prominent predictor of thriving in law enforcement officers. Many ways exist for law enforcement agencies to use effective training to promote thriving. Agencies may seek to enlist outside training vendors who specialize in topics important to officers. The training topics should be diverse to reach as many officers as possible. Firearms training, driving tactics, narcotics detection, management practices, mental health, and canine handling are some examples of training from outside vendors which may benefit officers. Sending officers to training, conferences, and symposiums outside of the agency may prove to be more effective and can lead to thriving. Training on relevant topics can benefit officers and promote interaction with peers within the officers' own agency and outside agencies. Social support and effective training can concurrently lead to thriving for law enforcement officers. Law enforcement agencies need to consider budgeting for training. In-house training may not be a budgetary issue; however, bringing in outside vendors or sending officers to training courses outside of the agency may be cost prohibitive without a substantial budget. An agency willing to invest in its officers will see a return on that investment as officers continue to thrive in the workplace.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was delimited one large local law enforcement agency in the State of Florida. Future studies should be expanded to other agencies in the State of Florida and eventually throughout the United States. Future studies might be designed to include smaller police agencies as well as state and federal agencies. This study was conducted with an agency that currently has a strong, respected leader, community support, and no calls for defunding the police. Considerations should be made to conduct studies on those agencies who do not have the same community support or may be currently working through the defunding process.

Seven factors of thriving for law enforcement were identified: sense of purpose, social support, spirituality, administrative support, maintaining physical health, effective training, and officer resilience (Baker et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2014; Christopher et al., 2020; Clifton et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2019; Greco & Fischetti, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). However, other potential factors of thriving for law enforcement may exist. The four most prominent factors of thriving identified in the study, sense of purpose, spirituality, effective training, and social support, can also be studied more in-depth. The central focus of the study was to determine which factors promoted thriving in law enforcement but did not concentrate specifically on any one factor. Future studies can also include expanded demographics: age, race, officer rank, prior law enforcement or military experience, and specialized training such as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) were not considered in this study.

Future studies might also be conducted in a more qualitative or mixed-methods approach. The current study was purposely delimited to a quantitative research design approach, but adding a qualitative dimension to the quantitative framework would add depth and richness to information achieved on the topic.

### **Conclusion**

Law enforcement is a demanding and stressful job and recruiting and retaining officers is becoming even more difficult (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Knowing the factors which allow an officer to thrive in the workplace may mitigate the stressors and increase recruitment and retention. Research on the factors of thriving for law enforcement officers was conducted in this study. The results of the study indicated participant law enforcement officers are thriving personally and in the workplace, regardless of gender, current job assignment, years on the job, and level of education. Social support and effective training were the most prominent

predictors of overall thriving. Law enforcement agencies seeking to improve their recruitment and retention rates should concentrate on offering effective training and encourage social support for officers. The findings of the study would appear to contribute to the body of knowledge related to law enforcement officers and thriving.

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## Appendix A

### PARTICIPATION FORM

#### SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

**Title:** Factors for Thriving in Law Enforcement

**Investigators:** Dr. Sarah Yates, Southeastern University; Kelly Wedley; Dr. Thomas Gollery, Southeastern University

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to evaluate the degree to which law enforcement officers perceive themselves as thriving. At this stage in the research thriving will be defined as well-being, resilience, and flourishing in law enforcement officers.

**What to Expect:** This research study is administered online. Participation in this research will involve completion of one questionnaire which will ask you to rate the seven potential aspects of thriving in law enforcement. There are also four demographic questions at the end of the questionnaire. It should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

**Risks:** There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for participating in the study.

**Your Rights and Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals

responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed. You will not be identified individually; we will be looking at the group as a whole.

**Contacts:** You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Kelly Wedley, 863-632-0281, [kwedley@seu.edu](mailto:kwedley@seu.edu) or Dr. Sarah Yates, 863-667-5000, [sjyates@seu.edu](mailto:sjyates@seu.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at [IRB@seu.edu](mailto:IRB@seu.edu)

**If you choose to participate:** Please, click NEXT if you choose to participate. By clicking NEXT, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge you are at least 18 years of age.

## Appendix B

### Thriving in Law Enforcement Scale

This survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. By submitting the completed survey electronically, you are granting us permission to use your results in our study. No individual information will ever be reported or released from this survey. Thank you for participating. Please rate your agreement with each of the items by using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "strongly agree."

#### *Social Support*

The relationships in my life are rewarding and supportive.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I tend to make friends as easily as others do.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

My family supports me in my career choice within law enforcement.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

My friends support me in my career choice within law enforcement.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I have friends outside of my career in law enforcement.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

***Administrative Support***

My supervisor encourages me and responds to my input and ideas.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

My supervisor supports me and my professional goals within the law enforcement agency.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I can discuss my concerns about work with my supervisor without fear of negative consequences.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

***Sense of Purpose***

My career in law enforcement provides me with a sense of purpose.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

My career choice of law enforcement allows me to make a difference in other people's lives.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

My career choice in law enforcement adds meaning to my life.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

***Spirituality***

I have beliefs that sustain me.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

My spiritual or religious beliefs provide me with a sense of strength at work.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I regularly engage in practices that enhance my spirituality.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

### ***Effective Training***

The things I learn through agency training courses are worthwhile to me in my career.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

Law enforcement agency-sponsored training courses have prepared me to do my job well.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

Law enforcement agency-sponsored training courses have inspired my desire for professional growth within the profession.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

### ***Resilience***

I adjust and recover quickly from stressful incidents.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I can cope with traumatic incidents (fatalities, child/domestic abuse, etc.) at work and not let the incidents affect my personal life.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I enjoy dealing with new and unusual situations at work.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

***Physical Well-being***

Compared to others my same age and gender, my physical health is very good.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I find time outside of work to engage in activities that promote good physical condition.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

I am committed to healthy dietary practices.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

Overall, I am thriving professionally in my career choice in the field of law enforcement.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

Overall, I am thriving on a personal level in my career choice in the field of law enforcement.

5- Strongly Agree    4- Agree    3- Uncertain    2- Disagree    1- Strongly Disagree

**Demographics**

*Please indicate which of the following describes you:*

***Gender:***

\_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

***Current job assignment:***

\_\_\_\_\_ Patrol (Supervisor or Deputy)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other sworn capacity (Detective, CST, Traffic, Narcotics, Ag Crimes, etc.)

***Years as a sworn law enforcement officer*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Highest level of education:***

\_\_\_\_\_ High school

\_\_\_\_\_ Undergraduate (2 or 4-year degree)

\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate (Master's degree or higher)

Thank you for participating!