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The South African Police Services: towards a model of empowerment

Summary

Police officers currently suffer unacceptable levels of physical and psychological trauma. This has an impact on their personal and job satisfaction and can negatively affect their ability to render effective service to the community. A four-phase model of primary intervention, intended to orchestrate intervention strategies in order to meet the demands on mental health in the SAPS is proposed in this study. It is argued that the four-phase model proposed here can have a significant positive effect on the overall effectiveness of mental health intervention within the SAPS, increasing levels of personal adjustment and enhancing organisational functionality. This should contribute to the achievement of more acceptable levels of synergy between the SAPS and the various South African communities it serves: in short, towards empowerment for all concerned.

Suid-Afrikaanse Polisiediens: op weg na 'n model van bemagtiging

Polisie-amptenare ervaar huidiglik onaanvaarbaar hoë vlakke van fisiese en psigiese trauma. Dit beïnvloed persoonlike en beroepsbevrediging en hou verband met die effektiewe lewering van diens aan die gemeenskap. 'n Vierfase-model vir primêre intervensie is ontwikkel om dringende aspekte van geestesgesondheid binne die polisiediens te konseptualiseer en voortvloeiend intervensiestrategieë doelmatig te orkestreer. Die vierfase-model word voorgestel as invalshoek om die oorhoofse effektiwiteit van geestesgesondheidsingrepe binne die polisiediens betekenisvol te beïnvloed. Dit behoort by te dra tot 'n groter mate van sinergie tussen die SAPD en die diverse Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking wat van die organisasie se dienslewering afhanklik is. Dit behels, kortliks, die bemagtiging van alle betrokkenes.

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Crime is endemic in South African society. Figures released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1995 suggest that the incidence of crimes of violence is increasing alarmingly in South Africa. The country ranks first in the world with regard to murders, namely 46 per hundred thousand. Russia follows with a murder rate of 30,4, and the USA with 9,9 per hundred thousand. Countries at the lower end of the spectrum, such as Britain and Japan, report relatively low murder rates of 0,9 and 0,7 per hundred thousand, respectively. The figures for rape released by the WHO suggest similar trends (cf Contreras 1995: 22-3).

The high crime rate experienced in South African naturally has a negative effect on South African police officials who, against such odds, struggle to execute their duties effectively. According to three prominent sociologists,

> ... of more than two million crimes reported to the police in 1993, only 22 per cent resulted in prosecutions and only 17 per cent in convictions (Adam *et al* 1997: 91).

The human and financial resources of the SAPS are stretched to the limits. Erwee & Theron (1998: 11) report:

> Our police officers are overworked. Over the past three years no new recruits have been taken in. According to them 5 403 members — an average of about 450 per month — left the police in 1997 ,leaving many police members discouraged as a result of being under-resourced. Others are of the opinion that some of the most capable people are leaving in droves. Financial constraints facing the police further exacerbate the working situation in that, for example, restraints on petrol consumption impinge on the normal execution of duties.

Meyer Kahn (1997: 8), then the newly appointed chief executive of the SAPS, concedes that the SAPS "have it tough at the moment". He admits that police morale is low and acknowledges that on any given day some ten thousand policemen are absent from work. Kahn concludes: "What we have is an under-trained, ill-equipped and under-resourced police service" (Madlala 1998: 9). It is also common knowledge that policemen believe themselves to be grossly underpaid.

Within this context, police officers currently suffer unacceptable levels of physical and psychological trauma. This leads, *inter alia*, to

high levels of stress and depression, reflected in absenteeism, unacceptable levels of alcohol consumption and impaired functionality. This in turn has a negative impact on personal and job satisfaction and on their ability to render an effective service to the community.

Against this background, the suicide statistics dramatically highlight the plight of the police. In 1997 and 1998, no fewer than 267 police officers committed suicide. Ndzilili (1997: 45-6) explains:

> Suicide in the police has risen dramatically over the past several months [of 1997] and it has become a matter of very serious concern. Not only do police officers have to deal with problems of everyday life, but also the extreme stress levels of working in a dangerous and thought-provoking environment.

"[I]t is evident", notes Ndzilili, "that suicide emanates from mental and physical distress" (see Table 1).

Table 1: South African Police Suicide Statistics for 1997 and 1998

Province	1997	1998
National Headquarters	2	10
Gauteng	26	43
Kwa-Zulu Natal	27	16
Mpumalanga	8	9
Northern Cape	8	6
North West	8	13
Northern Province	5	4
Eastern Cape	21	14
Free State	22	11
Western Cape	9	5
	136	131
	Total	267

1997: Thirteen: cause of death unknown

1998: Seven: cause of death unknown

(SAPS: Organisational Health and Safety 1999)

(Ndzilili 1997: 45)

Furthermore, SAPS officers are required to conduct their policing duties within constraints which strongly emphasise human rights.

Many police officers suggest that policing within the new post-apartheid ethos increases the law enforcer's stress level, due to a double-bind situation. Police officers are obliged to act in a crisis but any misinterpretation thereof may have detrimental effects on their careers. Many vignettes in the media illustrate, for example, how shooting incidents involving suspected criminals have prejudiced careers, leaving the police officer trapped and disillusioned.

Police dysfunctionality and their inability to deal with the present crime rate are, of course, systemic and multi-causal and should not be reduced to a simple linear cause-and-effect analysis.

Both contemporary society — a rapidly changing, complex, highly stressful and violent one — and the South African situation, coloured as it is by transition, economic recession, lack of investor confidence, fiscal constraints, and so on, impact negatively on police functionality. What, then, can be done to improve police adjustment and functionality? This paper proposes to highlight a means of empowerment utilising a four-phase primary intervention model.

It should be borne in mind that the SAPS psychological services are grossly understaffed: only 90 SAPS psychologists serve a police force of 160 000 (cf Botha 1998: personal communication). In the recent past, these services have implemented aspects of primary intervention, and should be congratulated on this. However, these measures should be further extended.

In this paper, general systems theory is applied as a meta-theory to conceptualise empowerment and increased functionality in relation to the SAPS. Within this framework, issues of importance to the SAPS can be addressed at individual, organisational, community and national levels. It is important to view the SAPS in the broader socio-political context within which they operate, as well as to bear in mind the many sub-systems that make up the SAPS: "a systems approach encourages analysis of events in terms of multiple causation rather than single causation" (French & Bell 1995: 93) .

General systems theory is a scientific approach developed from the notion that reality is complex and that phenomena which present themselves in reality are interrelated (cf Schoeman *et al* 1983: 1). Von

Bertalanffy (1972) argues that general systems theory evolved in opposition to the pre-scientific paradigm of linear causality.

According to Schoeman (1981: 3), a system (such as the SAPS) can be defined as a whole consisting of various components called sub-systems (divisions) which are related and in continuous interaction with one another. In order to survive, an open living system is in constant reciprocal interaction with its supra-system (or the outside world), which this promotes change (cf Buckly 1967: 50; French & Bell 1995: 89; Schoderbeck 1971: 265). In this regard Gibson *et al* (1997: 19-21) reiterate the importance of an organisation's interaction with its environment and the concomitant processing of related information. In the absence of such interaction, stasis and entropy result (cf Bowler 1981; Litterer 1969). This may be perceived as a degree of chaos, disintegration or randomness in a system.

Feedback cycles facilitate self-regulation in living systems and assist them to adapt within changing environments. This principle is exemplified within general systems theory by means of cybernetics, the study of control and feedback. Cybernetics is the science of the control of complex systems through information flow (Rademeyer 1978: 9-10). Rademeyer argues that the interaction between complex living systems and their supra-systems is linked with the functioning of the cybernetic cycle.

This cybernetic cycle suggests that (1) a situation analysis and (2) goal setting should take place. The setting of goals implies (3) behavioural actions. Any strategy demonstrates (4) an effect (feedback), which can be evaluated in terms of the initial goal setting. The information feedback process is utilised to modify strategies in order to achieve greater efficiency.

This indicates that the interaction between a living system and its environment forms a cybernetic cycle. By means of feedback control, a system can constantly adapt to changes in the environment. Therefore the SAPS needs to take cognisance of environmental dynamics in order to respond effectively and to adapt to the requirements of an ever-changing environment.

This paper will now focus on aspects of organisational effectiveness relevant to the SAPS.

1. Aspects of organisational effectiveness (OE)

According to Ridley & Mendoza (1993: 168), it is of the greatest importance to bear the grander scheme of operations in mind when viewing the functions of large governmental organisations. In failing to see the bigger picture, consultants may reduce the advantages of consultation for the organisation. Inaccurate assessment of the organisation or of its relationship to other systems can result in counterproductive intervention strategies if key evaluation criteria are overlooked or important areas in need of intervention are neglected. This may result in proposals that solve only short-term problems.

In this regard systems theory seems an appropriate approach for the evaluation and assessment of an organisation such as the SAPS. French & Bell (1995: 89) aver that:

> ... systems theory is one of the most powerful conceptual tools available for understanding the dynamics of organizations and organizational change.

Dougherty (cf Ridley & Mendoza 1993: 168) adds to this impression by stating that open systems theory is currently perhaps the most extensively applied framework for consultation and that it may well also be the best framework available to assist consultants in conceptualising the total organisation.

OE is commonly confused with the level of efficiency within an organisation. Consultants may incorrectly assume that interventions geared toward boosting internal efficiency will automatically improve OE. Although essential to the effective functioning of an organisation, efficiency does not equal effectiveness. Reducing OE merely to internal efficiency downplays both the importance of the larger environmental context and the ability of the organisation to procure inputs and disperse outputs. Gibson *et al* (1997: 21) concur, concluding that:

- the ultimate survival of an organisation depends on its ability to adapt to the demands of its environment, and, that
- in meeting these demands, the total input-process-output cycle must be the focus of managerial attention. Therefore, the criteria for effectiveness must reflect both considerations and

effectiveness, must be defined accordingly.

Professionals working within a systems framework often observe that interventions in one sub-system of an organisation have implications for other sub-systems. They are concerned that improvements in one area should not negatively affect another area.

Consultants should be wary of viewing the organisation as an open system without fully recognising and taking advantage of its symbiotic relationship with the surrounding supra-system. An organisation's capacity to collaborate, build supportive networks, and promote healthy interdependence with systems in the external environment is not always fully recognised, and therefore under-utilised.

Some theorists conceptualise OE as a process culminating in an end state with a final set of characteristics or reaching a final level of productivity. However, general agreement seems to exist that OE is contingent on the organisation's capacity to regenerate itself continually by means of change and development: "As such, static characteristics fail to capture the dynamic nature of OE" (Ridley & Mendoza 1993: 170).

Against the backdrop of the systemic approach, the self-regulation process is of prime importance as it mediates and directs the actions of the other processes. Boundaries serve to order the in- and out-flow of information between organisational units/sub-systems. Alderfelder (1983: 1594) contends that the relationship between boundary permeability and system vitality takes the shape of an inverted U. Moderate permeability is associated with higher levels of functioning whereas extremely low or high permeability would demonstrate organisational dysfunction (see Figure 1). When external and internal boundaries are excessively permeable an organisation runs the risk of being enmeshed in the supra-system and consequently losing its unique identity as an organisation. If, for instance, the police force becomes too closely aligned with the government of the day, its professional identity may be compromised:

> The flow of inputs and outputs within system units is loosely regulated by permeable boundaries, and organisational units suffer

from identity diffusion, a lack of cohesion, and chaos if such
boundaries are too permeable (Ridley & Mendoza 1993:173).

For example, if the boundaries between authority structures and
lower-ranking police officers become too permeable, lines of
authority may be jeopardised, creating undisciplined internal chaos
and in this way undermining the functionality of the SAPS as an
organisation.

Figure 1: Hypothetical relationship between system vitality (the tendency
towards survival and/or growth) and boundary permeability

System
vitality

Boundary permeability
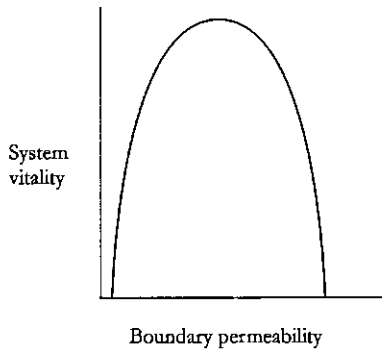
(Ridley & Mendoza 1993: 173)

For the organisation to survive and maximize its returns, it needs
to enhance its co-operative and supportive relationships with the
surrounding supra-system as well as with the elements of its sub-
systems. Survival within a dynamic environment requires an effective
adaptive ability. The organisation's capacity for flexibility by means
of effective self-regulation supports its ability to effect timeous
organisational change.

The dynamics of the environment continuously require adaptive
responses from the organisation in order to meet the demands of an
ever-changing environment. Implicit in this process is long-term
reorganisation in response to the chronic environmental pressure
which imposes continuous constraints on the organisation's

operations. The organisation's ability to anticipate future environmental demands, such as increased pressure on the SAPS to transform itself in terms of the new political dispensation and to contain the ever-increasing levels of crime, is a function of its capacity for strategic planning.

Survival of the organisation as an open system is dependent on maintaining negative entropy. Various paradigms have come into being to achieve organisational change, increase effectiveness and enhance the quality of life for the entire workforce. One such an approach is the Taoist paradigm.

2. The Taoist paradigm

The Taoist paradigm of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) is based on the human and economic concerns of the individuals and organisations served. It strives to improve the quality of life of the entire work force and thus to enhance the work performance of individuals as well as the functionality of the organisation.

The principles governing the Taoist paradigm are systemic and dynamic. This means that sub-systems are in a continual state of flux both internally and in relation to one another. The Taoist paradigm proposes notions such as growth, development, choice, change and cultural sensitivity. It is further assumed that change in any one part of the system gives rise to change in any or all other parts of the system. It is also recognised that direct and indirect summative effects occur, for example, that the whole system (organisation) is greater than the totality of its sub-systems (units) (cf Gerstein & Strumer 1993: 179).

Change therefore emanates from modifications to any one of the behavioural, structural, technological, and environmental features of any of the sub-systems, effecting change in the entire system. According to the systemic notion of equifinality, change may be facilitated at any point in the system. Therefore there is no 'right' place to initiate the change process (cf Brown *et al* 1991: 106). This paper argues for primary intervention orchestrated by the SAPS's existing psychological services. Such an intervention is designed to empower sub-systems and its members by affirming what is going

well rather than reinforcing aspects not working effectively (cf De Shazer 1988).

Each intervention should be assessed in terms of its desired (actual) benefit and potential (actual) cost. Three time frames should be considered, namely short-term, intermediate and long-term, when evaluating the cost-benefit relationship of an intervention. Initially, short-term costs outweigh benefits. At the intermediate stage the intervention cost normally equals the benefit. Once the long-term goals have been met, benefits should be major and appealing as compared to minimal additional costs. The advantage of effective interventions will be apparent, for instance, in terms of improved employee health, productivity, job commitment, and so on (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Benefits to cost ratio and goals
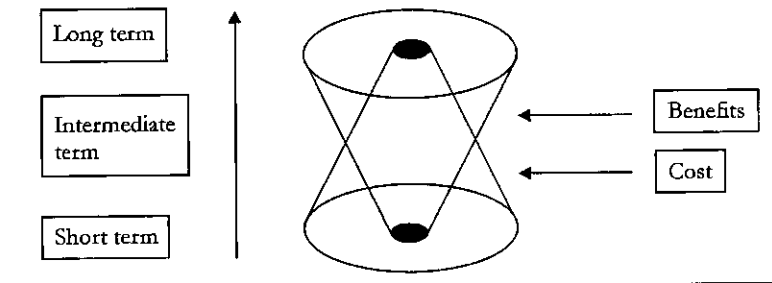
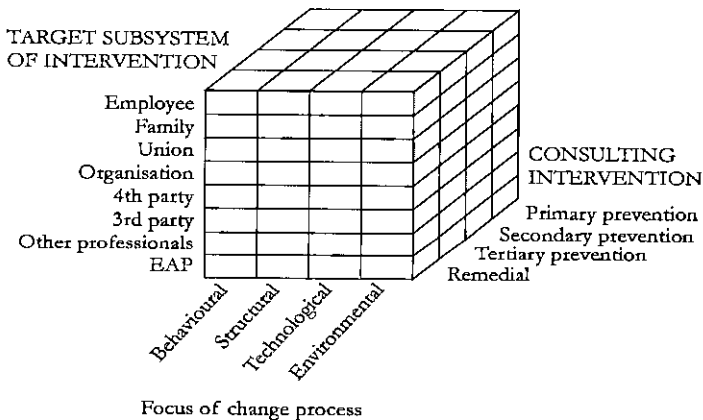(Gerstein & Sturmer 1993: 180)

An organisation such as the SAPS should consider the short-term, intermediate and long-term benefits and costs of implementing or failing to implement an intervention. The economic and human resource goals of organisations and their employees are frequently incompatible. What is in the best interests of the organisation is not always advantageous to employees. A systemic intervention viewed by employees as beneficial or even essential may simultaneously be perceived by the employer as too costly. Organisational leaders need to be persuaded that human factors are indeed intimately connected

to economic outcomes, but only after initial expenditure (cf Gerstein & Sturmer 1993: 180).

A consultative intervention within an organisation may lead to a successful assimilation of human and economic factors. When this eventuates within each of the sub-systems it may result in a system-wide improvement in functionality. An intervention may be conceptualised as follows (see Figure 3):

A model proposed by Morrill *et al* (1974: 355) suggests how a consultant may conceive of an isomorphic intervention, once an initial assessment has been undertaken. In this paper the target of intervention is, in the final analysis, the empowerment of SAPS officers. If this intervention is mediated successfully, a positive ripple effect within the broader SAPS organisation and in terms of its service delivery to the community may be effected.

Figure 3: Conceptualising the consultation intervention

Focus of change process

(Gerstein & Sturmer 1993: 83, adapted)

Once the target system has been identified, the consultant and consultee should assess the nature of the problem, discuss present and past strategies which have proved successful or unsuccessful within the particular context, and identify the strengths inherent within a sub-system. The consultant should decide on the focus of the change process to be initiated, bearing the potential cost-benefit relations in mind.

The target of intervention in this instance is the SAPS psychological services and the ultimate aim is to empower SAPS officers. French & Bell (1995: 156) add that organisational improvement results from targeting groups or individuals for interventions. Four components of a sub-system may form the potential focus for change (cf Gerstein & Shullman 1992: 596-9). In this article the main focus falls on the behavioural component, so as to facilitate change in the job performance, work attitude, interpersonal relationships, mental health and overall well-being of employees. The other possible intervention components may be conceived of as structural, technological and environmental.

At the behavioural level, the strategy to be used to facilitate sub-system change will be designed by way of consultative interventions making use of preventative goals and aimed at empowering SAPS officers. The consultant may intervene, *inter alia*, by way of initiating psycho-educational programs and providing employee development opportunities within the framework of the Taoist paradigm.

To reiterate, the Taoist paradigm emphasises the following values:

- the importance of change;
- co-operation and interrelationships between individuals and groups;
- acknowledging and rewarding strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses;
- balancing and assimilating opposing forces;
- emphasising creative solutions rather than problems; and
- having due regard for the consultee's or organisation's current structure and preferred cultural orientation.

This paper will now proceed to highlight aspects of empowerment achievable within the SAPS by means of such intervention.

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3. Empowerment

Various theorists reflect in the following way on the topic of empowerment: empowerment is a construct that operates at both the micro- (individual) and the macro- (societal) level of analysis: the micro-level implies a sense of self-empowerment while at the macro-level the concern is with advancing social and political empowerment, including legal rights (Rappaport 1987: 130).

According to Perkins & Zimmerman (1995: 569), empowerment relates personal strengths and abilities, community support systems and pro-active behaviour to macro-social issues including social policy and social change.

Zimmerman (1995: 581) further suggests that empowerment is a process whereby people and organisations gain power and influence over their own affairs. French & Bell (1995: 94) add that empowerment enhances performance as well as individual well-being.

3.1 The assumptions underlying empowerment

The following assumptions underlying empowerment are presented in order to provide a framework for the discussion of this important construct:

- Empowerment is a multi-level construct. It explains how people gain mastery at individual, group/organisational and community levels. An ongoing reciprocal interaction among these levels is suggested and the ripple effect of one level of analysis on other levels is assumed to be of great importance.
- Other things being equal, an organisation with an empowerment ideology will be better at finding and developing resources than one with a helper/'helpee' ideology.
- The historical, socio-political context in which an individual, a programme or a policy operates will influence the outcome of any empowerment initiative.
- Participating in decisions and activities which are culturally meaningful to the participants is more likely to be empowering.
- Certain types of language promote a mind-set reflecting activity versus passivity and empowerment versus disempowerment (cf Becker's 1963 labeling theory).

- Empowerment accentuates individual strengths, competence, pro-activity and general well-being.
- Empowerment implies co-operation in the realisation of personal and common goals and the ability to access community resources (such as the media) in a productive manner.
- Locally developed solutions are more empowering than external solutions applied in a general way.

While highlighting some aspects of empowerment, the authors wish to focus in particular on the notion of psychological empowerment.

3.2 Psychological empowerment (PE)

Psychological empowerment (PE) refers to empowerment at the individual level of analysis (cf Zimmerman 1995). By the same token, Zimmerman is at pains to emphasise that PE is more than just an intrapersonal construct, implying that macro-societal issues are also important. Hence, PE incorporates notions such as personal control, pro-active behaviour, and a critical awareness of broader socio-political dynamics. While PE may be distinguished from organisational and community empowerment it also influences and is influenced by empowerment at other levels of analysis.

At the organisational level of analysis PE refers to improved organisational effectiveness characterised by effective competition for resources, networking with other organisations, or expansion of the organisation's influence.

At the community level of analysis empowerment refers to individuals working together in an organised fashion in order to improve their collective lives as well as the linkages among community organisations and agencies which help to maintain that quality of life (cf Zimmerman 1995: 582).

This paper wishes to highlight the three components of psychological empowerment as explicated by Zimmerman (1995): intrapersonal, interpersonal and behavioural.

3.2.1 The intrapersonal component

The intrapersonal component relates to how an individual (in this case, a police officer) evaluates him- or herself. When his or her view

is positive he or she can perceive him- or herself as having some control or influence on his or her environment, *i e*, family, work and socio-political context (cf Paulhus 1983: 1254). This thus includes his or her view on personal efficacy and the motivation to accomplish goals. These perceptions are basic elements providing people with the initiative to influence the achievement of desired outcomes via their behaviour.

The intrapersonal component of PE includes perceived control, competence and efficacy. Such perceptions assist people in engaging in behaviours that may lead to certain desired outcomes (cf Strecher *et al* 1986: 74). Individuals (police officers) who do not believe in their own ability to achieve goals will expend less energy in trying to accomplish such goals. This could have negative implications for the functioning of the SAPS division in which such individuals are deployed. If a number of members are affected in this way, there could be a ripple effect within the SAPS, manifesting itself in symptoms such as a high rate of absenteeism and suicide. Other aspects correlating negatively with PE include perceptions of social isolation, helplessness, powerlessness and normlessness (cf Zimmerman & Rappaport 1988; Zimmerman 1990; Rappaport 1984) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Drawing the three components of psychological empowerment
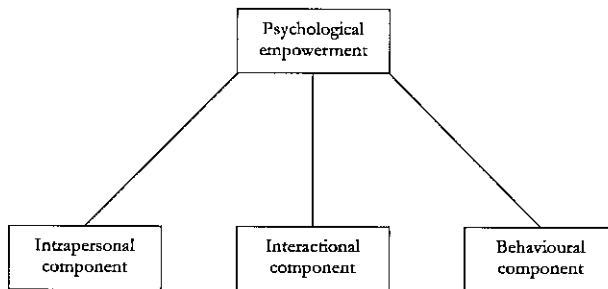
(Zimmerman 1995: 488)

3.2.2   The interactional component

People (police officers) need to be familiar with their cultural and socio-political context, especially in view of the transformation process currently under way in South Africa. It is crucial, given this new context, that police officers learn about the options and resources available to them, so as to gain confidence and to be able to influence their environments. An inability to adapt and contribute to the new ethos could be detrimental to the adaptation of police officers within the force. This could, in turn, have negative consequences such as depression and counter-productivity. This suggests that they need to understand the norms and values of the SAPS context. Such norms and values may include new emphases on human rights, co-operative decision-making, commitment to collective (as opposed to personal) interests, and mutual assistance. Critical awareness refers to one's understanding of the resources required to achieve a desired goal, knowledge of how to acquire those resources, and skills for managing them once they have been obtained (Zimmerman 1995: 589). This ability to mobilise resources is an essential aspect of the interactional component of PE because it implies environmental mastery. Police officers could be equipped to broaden their life skills in this regard.

The interactional component of empowerment thus includes aspects such as decision-making, problem solving and leadership abilities. These skills may be developed in settings that are supportive of the development of employees (police officers) or inhibited in unsupportive settings. These skills empower individuals to become more independent and able to control events in their lives.

3.2.3   The behavioural component

Actions taken in order to influence outcomes directly epitomise the behavioural component of PE. Within the SAPS context these will have the purpose of equipping police officers to adapt to change more effectively and to cope with stress. Ultimately they should result in more effective crime management behaviour. Zimmerman (1995: 590) puts it succinctly:

> These three components of PE merge to form a picture of a person [police officer] who believes that he/she has the capability to influence a given context (intrapersonal component), understands

> how the system works in that context (interactional context), and engages in behaviours to exert control in the context (behavioural component).

With regard to empowerment, the role of management is particularly important. Ninety percent of organisational success or failure can be ascribed to management competence (cf Moolman 1998). Leading organisations take active control of management rather than taking on a reactive stance. The same could be said of the SAPS organisation. Mufamadi (cf Hadland 1998:2) cites Kahn's notion that "pockets of excellence" should be identified. The authors concur with this view and therefore identified the SAPS psychological services as an already professionally equipped division to target for intervention. Given the existing reservoir of professional theoretical knowledge and competence it seems that the SAPS psychological services are currently underutilised and reactively employed.

Against this background a four-phase model of primary intervention was developed, aimed at conceptualising the orchestration of a mainly consultative intervention within the SAPS psychological services. It includes the following key issues: advocacy; preventative education; dyadic counselling, and self-help groups.

The rationale for the development of this model stems from the construct of empowerment (cf Rappaport 1987). The authors aim in particular to highlight preventative education and self-help groups.

4. The four-phase model of primary intervention

4.1 Advocacy

The aim of advocacy is to promote the image of SAPS officers as part of the empowerment process. True empowerment often depends on changes beyond the individual and the group. Advocacy is one way of facilitating such changes by making the social, political and economic environment conducive to the development of people with special needs (police officers). The term advocacy refers to the act of supporting people whose rights may be in jeopardy. Class advocacy involves protecting the rights of an entire category of people, in this instance, police officers (cf Lewis & Lewis 1989: 189).

People's growth and development are affected both by the systems in which they participate personally and more indirectly by broader systems. In order to facilitate the empowerment of police officers, advocacy should be promoted within both the broader SAPS community and the organisation itself. Kurt Lewin's formulation $B = f(P . E)$ (cf Lewis & Lewis 1989: 145) suggests that behaviour is a function of the interaction between a person and an environment, rather than a function of a single individual. Since police officers are in continual interaction with their surroundings, the impact of social, political and economic factors should be considered. If they feel powerless to control their own lives, major health problems may result. Mental health and competence in living require a level of self-esteem which, in turn, may well depend the belief that one's behaviour can affect the world. The well-being of the SAPS may be enhanced by the sense of power, effectiveness and self-determination experienced by its individual members.

Problems deriving from social systems must be addressed by means of interventions in those systems. Such interventions can take place at any of several systemic levels. Interventions aimed at shaping social policy within the SAPS would use indirect methods to affect the social, political and economic environment. This may, for example, be achieved by way of an orchestrated public relations effort on behalf of the SAPS, by the judicial selection of aspirant police officers, or by a concerted effort at orientation and training aimed at meeting community expectations. Such training could be incorporated into the four-phase model of primary intervention, as proposed in this paper.

Policies at the level of the organisation concern the way in which the SAPS management solves its problems or treats its members. Addressing human concerns is essential, since the health and well-being of police officers depend on it. Empowerment and the provision of opportunities at the level of primary prevention may be considered. This can be done via changes in management policy, advocating a general concern for the promotion and advancement of personal power and well-being. Given their professional training in human behaviour, psychologists within the SAPS psychological services should participate in management policy forums aimed at

systemic intervention. Such intervention should aim to shape the environment so as to promote, support and develop the job satisfaction and functionality of SAPS officers. Psychologists could act as consultants, promoting such a policy within the broader structure as well as in sub-divisions of SAPS. Practical implications could, for instance, include aspects central to motivation, such as reinforcement in the form of public acknowledgement for meritorious conduct. Other benefits could include cost-effective monetary rewards (such as winning a trip, or bonuses), extra leave and so on (cf Skinner 1971).

4.2 Preventative education

The World Health Organisation's definition of health suggests that the prerequisite for people to be healthy would be that they should live in circumstances consistent with positive social, political and economic conditions which allow them to love, work and create (cf Banyard 1996: 3).

The current world context, as it influences well-being, necessitates a reappriasal of the traditional model of health care. The aspects which follow deserve particular consideration.

4.2.1   Modernity

For most people, contemporary society is a rapidly changing, highly stressful and violent place in which to live. Furthermore, many people work under extreme pressure to meet their obligations at work, at home and in the social sphere. In such a complex and changing world, relationships inevitably suffer and channels of communication which normally should provide support more readily break down (cf Van Niekerk 1997: 5). Furthermore, modern city life entails a greater degree of complexity, stress and mental illness. Hence, compared to 1950, a twenty-five-year-old today is ten times more likely to suffer depression (cf James 1997: 29).

4.2.2   The South African socio-political context

With the advent of free and fair elections in April 1994, South Africa entered a new and challenging phase in its history: "South Africa has begun a transition that for many is seen as, or experienced as, a

triumph over evil" (cf Adam *et al* 1997: 5). Despite the abolition of the old race laws and the existence of a bill of rights and a constitution — envied by many countries — the challenges facing South African society are formidable. Few South Africans are excluded from the stressful consequences of a transforming society.

Given the turmoil and change prevalent in society, some may argue that the South African psyche is under siege. This new society is to a large extent characterised by violence, which colours the lives of most South Africans. While politically motivated crime is on the decline, other forms of violence have come to the fore, most notably bank robberies and other armed robberies, murder, car theft and car hijacking. This exacerbates feelings of powerlessness and helplessness (cf Van Niekerk 1997: 6).

According to Dugmore (Van Niekerk 1997: 6), too much stress without corrective outlets can manifest itself in anxiety, depression, alcoholism and other forms of addictive behaviour, some of which are reflected within the SAPS.

4.2.3   The SAPS environment

An individual's development is influenced by the nature of the environment in which he or she functions. French & Bell (1995) point out that most individuals will exhibit a drive towards personal growth and development in an environment which is both supportive and challenging. As people develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially they interact with an environment which, to a greater or lesser degree, supports growth. This also holds true for the SAPS environment.

Living conditions in South Africa are further exacerbated by the stress inherent in the police officer's working environment. In the course of his or her duties, the police officer comes into contact with a broad range of pathologies including family violence, sexual abuse and abuse of spouses or children, which he or she may not be equipped to deal with effectively, both in the emotional sense and otherwise. Furthermore, given the violent context in which police officers operate, they themselves are at great risk of becoming South African crime statistics. This clouds many a police officer's life experience.

This context demands a re-evaluation of the best way to enhance an SAPS officer's mental well-being. The authors wish to propose primary intervention as a cost-effective means of promoting mental health within this context. According to Zimmermann (1995: 581-3), prevention strategies often enhance personal empowerment. This suggests that effective primary prevention programmes should aim to eliminate or reduce powerlessness and or exploitation. Stronger, more secure and optimistic people will be more effective in any situation.

The primary prevention approach challenges the traditional medical model of mental well-being. According to Banyard (1996: 4), the bio-medical model deals with illness and its development rather than with the promotion of good health. Furthermore there is no conclusive evidence that mental conditions can be eliminated by means of one-to-one therapy (cf Albee & Ryan-Finn 1993: 116). The high cost incurred during such treatment affects the funding of medical schemes. If current efforts to curb the rising costs of health cate are to be successful, a locus of prevention must be part of a concerted strategy to promote well-being.

In sum, the following principles serve as an intellectual reference point for the discussion that follows:

- Environments promote, restrict, confine or harm people's psychological and physical health and/or growth.
- Prevention is better than cure.
- Primary health care (PHM) goes beyond traditional approaches to mental health care (such as one-to-one counselling and in-patient psychiatric care) to include preventative education, community outreach initiatives, advocacy and self-help groups.
- The notion of empowerment is emphasised (cf Albee & Ryan-Finn 1993: 119).

As has already been noted, SAPS officers experience a great deal of stress in the course of their work, which has a negative impact on their emotional and mental well-being, contributing to family discord, strained relationships and reduced levels of job satisfaction and functionality.

This has both human and financial cost implications, unnecessarily straining the financial resources of POLMED. This may well negatively influence long-term benefits for police officers, since the depletion of funds creates a new stress factor. Costs incurred for medical treatment have become so high as to create a major incentive to avoid becoming ill in the first place. In addition, the changing view of health has led people to develope the expectation that they should have healthy and enjoyable lives. In the pursuit of well-being, psychology plays a salient role.

4.2.4 The importance of psychology in prevention

The human and financial costs involved indicate that prevention should form part of a concerted effort to redress the situation within the SAPS. Primary prevention strategies target changes in life style for those who are at high risk of developing a wide range of physical and mental disorders. Such interventions aim at orientating people towards the management of their own medical and mental health. Health care, especially the current move towards the individual's active management of his or her own health, demands that services move from an emphasis on tertiary intervention to primary prevention.

This is in accordance with South Africa's new health policy, which underlines the role of preventative care. The report of the Institute for Medicine (IOM) identified psychology as the discipline that has made the greatest contribution to prevention and prevention research in the area of mental health (Mundoz *et al* 1996).

The application of systems theory as an explanatory model shows that illness could result from the interaction between sub-systems within the organism (the police officer) as well as from the interaction between the organism and its supra-system (society). The new primary health care perspective wishes to prevent disease and promote health. According to Banyard (1996: 7), such intervention requires a focus on behavioural change. This brings us to psychology and its application to health promotion alongside traditional medical intervention. One avenue worthy of exploration is that of interactive preventative workshops.

4.2.5 Interactive preventative workshops

Prevention is intended to avoid unnecessary suffering. The disruption in people's lives, the emotional pain involved and the sometimes irreparable impact on the lives of the families and communities of those affected by mental dysfunction make it imperative that the SAPS as an organisation devote substantial resources to prevention.

Selective preventive interventions are targeted at individuals or sub-groups of the population whose risk of developing a mental disorder is significantly higher than average, as evidenced by biological, psychological, or social risk factors.

Critics of primary prevention often argue that there have been no reliable or valid studies carried out to support preventionist claims. In fact, the literature abounds with evidence supporting the effectiveness of prevention efforts in many areas. If preventionists are currently succeeding despite their adversaries and a perennial lack of funding, imagine the future possibilities if some of the monetary and political support given to biological-psychiatric and medical research were allocated to the field of primary prevention (Albee & Ryan-Finn 1993: 119).

Within the SAPS context the aim of primary prevention intervention at the level of the organism would be to contribute to the well-being of the police officer. Levels of happiness, satisfaction, adjustment and — it is hoped — functionality would be increased, contributing to a safer community. At the level of the organisation such intervention aims at improving the general well-being of employees, reducing financial burdens, absenteeism, low productivity and dysfunctionality while increasing overall intra-organisational effectiveness.

Preventative educational workshops may focus on: psychological well-being; symptoms indicative of pathology, such as impending suicide, depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome, etc; interpersonal effectiveness; communication skills; assertiveness training; conflict resolution management; stress management; rational-emotive thinking skills; problem-solving skills; lateral thinking skills; cultural and gender sensitivity; leadership; decision-making skills and affirmative action.

4.3 Dyadic counselling

Even with the most effective primary health care system in place, not all problems can be prevented (cf Lewis & Lewis 1989). Under certain circumstances, referral to professional services is warranted, for example, crisis intervention in situations such as threatened suicide, acute depression and other forms of pathology. Police officers with the benefit of psycho-educational training will recognise more serious symptoms in themselves and others and be able to facilitate referral to professionals. This could avoid disabling consequences or even death and the concomitant detrimental effects on the individual, the next of kin and colleagues. Debriefing is indicated in situations of acute violence which may lead to post-traumatic stress.

4.4 Empowerment by means of self-help groups

This section of the paper advances the argument in favour of the establishment of self-help groups and serves to demonstrate how such groups can support the process of primary intervention while leading to empowerment.

Many SAPS officers are unwilling to accept the role of the client because they believe it may be to their detriment and lead to discrimination against them. This may relate to the fact that not all officials in positions of authority are equipped to deal sensitively with potentially stigmatising information. This can lead police officers to eschew exposure of their problems in order to avoid a potentially alienating experience within the organisation. In addition, the 'macho' image still adhered to by many inhibits them from seeking assistance with personal problems (cf Botha 1998: personal communication).

An empowerment strategy may include the notion of self-help groups serving as a support network. Such networks may fulfil a dual function, providing a catchment for referrals from the SAPS psychological services as well as creating an opportunity for voluntary participation.

In self-help organisations people with problems in common are brought into contact with one another. This provides for mutual support in requesting or offering active assistance and dealing with common problems. Group members are expected to play a role in the

management of their own problems, via confrontation within a supportive environment. Groups are democratically run, while individual members are not pathologised or stigmatised.

Steele (1974: 106) discusses the self-help phenomenon in general terms and identifies several factors that seem to make such organisations effective:

- There is reference identification to a peer group.
- Attitudes are altered by means of emphasis on action and experience.
- Communication is facilitated by peer members. Common identities decrease the need to overcome cultural, social and educational barriers.
- Opportunities for socialisation are facilitated.
- Open discussion is encouraged, and confrontation by peers helps decrease individual defensiveness.
- Because members come from the same community they are better able to provide emotional support and understanding.
- Self-help groups to some extent simulate external reality.

Although self-help groups allow for some professional participation or sponsorship, the achievement of success depends on the active participation and commitment of group members. The success of self-help groups relates to the 'helper therapy' principle: while receiving help is therapeutic, giving help is even more so (Lewis & Lewis 1989: 177). Skovholt (1974: 62) summarises The benefits of the provision of help as follows:

Making an impact on another's life increases the helper's level of experienced interpersonal competence (Lewis & Lewis 1989: 177). The effective helper often experiences a sense of equality in assisting others. In the process, the power relations inherent in most therapeutic encounters are de-emphasised (cf Laing 1967 & 1990). The effective helper often receives valuable personalised learning while assisting the 'helpee'.

Gartner & Riessman (1984: 19-20) point out further advantages:

The support group process enhances the development of independence on the part of the helper. In assisting others to find solutions to their problems, the helper is forced to distance himself

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from problems similar to his or her own. In the process he or she obtains a feeling of social usefulness in playing the role of the helper.

Self-help organisations promote experiential learning (Borkman 1984: 206-16) which develops by way of self-reflection. The context of shared experience serves to validate the individual experience.

Family members, friends and significant others are often experienced as unsupportive in relation to clients' focal problems. Because of the gaps experienced in their support networks, members may augment their social support system by way of self-help groups. In these groups, their experienced isolation in regard to their fears is diminished and hope is instilled by introducing them to people who have overcome their problems.

Riessman (1985: 2-5) claims that people who have helped themselves feel empowered and are better able to exercise control over targeted aspects of their lives. Empowerment by means of self-help encourages the critical evaluation of their environments, hence sensitising them to any external causes of their problems. In the process they become advocates of their own cause and develop significant political leverage.

Kibel (1997: 177) discusses a possible physiological foundation to the experience of increased well-being by members of support groups. According to him it is likely that serotonin levels in the brain increase as a result of successful participation in self-help groups. This has an effect similar to the psychotropic drug fluoxitine, which elevates serotonin levels, with a concomitant experience of well-being.

Police officer's job satisfaction may be enhanced by exposure within self-help groups. Such experiences equip them to deal more sensitively and effectively with the psychological effects of crisis situations on victims, promoting while executing their daily duties, thus further enhances empowerment.

5. Conclusion

It is common knowledge that police officers currently suffer unacceptable levels of physical and psychological trauma which manifest in high levels of stress and depression. Symptoms include

abnormal levels of absenteeism, excessive alcohol consumption, personal and job dissatisfaction and impaired functionality. This lessens the effectiveness of the service they render within the community.

The future of any society — including South Africa — depends to a large extent on the maintenance of law and order. However, the endemic crime experienced in our society has a negative impacts on the collective psyche since no one is exempt from its consequences.

The authors' concern about this unacceptable situation has led them to develop a four-phase preventative model which aims to advance and reinforce the role of the SAPS psychological services. More effective utilisation of the expertise within the SAPS psychological services could empower police officers, with the ultimate aim of enhancing the force's functionality in combating crime.

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