

**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN COPING OF TRAFFIC  
OFFICERS**

by

**ROCHELLE JACOBS**

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**SUPERVISOR: MRS A VAN NIEKERK**

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## DECLARATION

I, ROCHELLE DOROTHY JACOBS, student number 42750830, declare that the dissertation entitled “**Exploring the role of spirituality in coping of traffic officers**” is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used, or have quoted from, have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that ethical clearance to conduct the research has been obtained from the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (see Annexure D), the University of South Africa, and from the participants (see Annexure A).



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ROCHELLE DOROTHY JACOBS

30 NOVEMBER 2014

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## **SUMMARY**

### **EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN COPING OF TRAFFIC OFFICERS**

**by**

**ROCHELLE JACOBS**

SUPERVISOR : Mrs A Van Niekerk  
DEPARTMENT : Industrial and Organisational Psychology  
DEGREE : M Com (Industrial and Organisational Psychology)

The main purpose of this study is to explore the role spirituality plays in the coping of traffic officers within the South African Traffic Services. A sample of ten traffic officers participated in the study, and data was obtained by means of open-ended questions during in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The literature review aimed to conceptualise spirituality, to conceptualise coping, and to theoretically explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. Specific aims for the empirical study were: to gain a better understanding of how traffic officers experience the role of spirituality in coping with their role within the South African context; to provide a framework that can assist with creating an understanding of the role spirituality plays in coping as a traffic officer; and to formulate recommendations for possible future research that explores the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers within the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, more specifically in employee and organisational wellness, and career counselling.

The research findings showed that traffic officers in the sample all utilised spirituality in the workplace to various extents, and that they exhibited adaptive coping abilities when doing so. They associated less spirituality or a lack of spirituality with weaker coping abilities. It was found that spirituality in the traffic officers is informed by a foundation of spirituality or religion, purpose to their work and life, their connection to their spiritual source, and the fruits of spirituality. Their coping ability was influenced by upbringing and background, by stressors from their work environment and by coping mechanisms. The role of spirituality in

the coping of traffic officers culminated in their ability to interpret the meaning of spirituality, and then to implement spirituality in order to cope.

## **KEY WORDS**

Spirituality, coping, traffic officer, traffic work environment, interpretive paradigm, employee and organisational wellness, career counselling, qualitative study

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH**

This dissertation explores the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. In this chapter a description is given of the background and motivation for the study. The problem statement and research questions are formulated and presented here. General aims are stated, as well as specific aims given pertaining to the literature review and the empirical study. The paradigm perspectives are discussed, which form the conceptual framework within which the systematic study has been conducted. The research design and methodology have also been discussed. A description is given of how the dissertation chapters will be presented, and this overview concludes with a summary.

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION**

In more than eight years of working in the traffic law enforcement profession, I have experienced that traffic officers either do not have adequate mechanisms for coping with their stressful work environment, or members do not use the employee assistance opportunities available. The South African workforce is very diverse and organisations must consider important factors which may influence employee well-being (Van Daalen & Odendaal, 2008, p. 425), with work conditions having become increasingly important (Luthans, 2011, p. 144). Individuals presented with the same stressful circumstances react in different ways, but theorists attempting to explain stress and coping seldom consider this aspect when conducting related research (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1). A reason why people react differently to stressors may be explained through the concept of spirituality, as spirituality is considered a very important shield against stressful situations (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Krok, 2008, p. 643).

There was not much research to be found on the concept of the coping of traffic officers specifically. Van Heerden (1990) found that traffic officials' subjective experience of stress was influenced positively by a stress handling programme. Police officers appear to be a popular law enforcement category in research on

spirituality or religion (Joubert & Grobler, 2013; Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003), and stress (Chopko, 2007; Louw & Viviers, 2010; Marais, 2002; Steyn, Vawda, Wyatt, Williams & Madu, 2013). Nonetheless, human context is very important in attempting to understand coping and adaptation (Moos, 2002, p. 67), as different work environments present different health experiences (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 250). Human context involves those aspects that influence how people cope in their lives, including the environment, social climate, cultural differences, adversities, life circumstances, and personal characteristics (Moos, 2002, p. 67).

Firstly, the traffic officers' context is informed by their appointment in terms of the National Road Traffic Act (1996). Their duties in terms of this Act include requiring a person to provide information necessary for identification, inspecting any vehicle to determine if it complies with the provisions of the Act, regulating traffic on any public road, and to temporarily prohibit individuals from driving should they be considered unable.

Secondly, traffic officers acquire duties by virtue of their appointment as peace officers in terms of section 334(1)(a) of the Criminal Procedure Act (1977), as published on 2 September 2011 (Gazette No. 34583, Regulation 707). Thus, they have peace officer duties as well as all powers conferred on police officials, with the exclusion of sections as stipulated, and/or are subject to certain provisions. Research involving policing and stress has shown that police work is in fact stressful (Anderson, Litzenberger & Plecas, 2002, p. 399). It follows that traffic officers may experience the pressures associated with such police tasks as well.

Traffic officers perform administrative duties within the Law Enforcement Section of the Traffic Services. Law enforcement duties are also carried out on all the public roads (National Road Traffic Act, 1996) within a specific local municipal area or provincial area. Since members in this profession face the threat of unexpected injuries, traffic departments are considered high risk departments (Mushwana, 1998, p. 134). To this effect working conditions that include unusual working hours, great stress, and lurking threats, make it difficult to cope with and persevere in this work (Mushwana, 1998, p. 3).

Actual law enforcement constitutes about 60% of the traffic officer's working day, and this career provides very close contact with the multifaceted problems evident in society (Pienaar, 2007, p. 60). Problems in society include external stressors posed by globalisation, technology, shifts in the economy, and racial issues (Luthans, 2011, p. 282). Further, the public may hold negative attitudes towards traffic officers (Pienaar, 2007, p. 63).

There are also internal organisational stressors, such as internal politics, role uncertainty and red tape (Luthans, 2008, p. 249). Furthermore, experience in the field reveals that traffic officers often receive urgent instructions from supervisors, which result from complaints from either the public or the control room.

According to literature there appears to be a growing interest in spirituality in the workplace (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009, p. 230). Spirituality is associated with the field of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5), while feelings of well-being are associated with positive emotions (Strümpfer, 2006, p. 146). Spirit at work refers to a state of physiological stimulation and positive affect, characterised by interpersonal, physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental elements (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 26).

Spirit at work is comprised of feelings of deep well-being, the belief that your service can make the world a better place, and a relationship with a higher power (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008, p. 319). Spirituality involves being connected to others and finding work valuable (Karakas, 2010, p. 2). This sense of interconnectedness is contained in the need for self-actualisation as reflected in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and motivates some people (Theron, 2009a, p. 132).

Spirituality in the workplace may have potential advantages, such as improved employee well-being (Karakas, 2010, p. 6), and disadvantages, such as discrimination due to spiritual beliefs (Karakas, 2010, p. 26). However, it is believed that people may have control over their personal well-being (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 8) by employing forgiveness, spirituality and religion (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 275). The concepts of spirituality and religion may be used in research

interchangeably (Rowe & Allen, 2003). However, there are differences between spirituality and religion because spirituality is not bound to a specific denomination, whereas religion encompasses the convictions of a particular religious body (Karakas, 2010, p. 8). Since spirituality and religion may also overlap and both are thought to hold potential benefits for well-being, it is useful to include both in this study (Collet, 2011, p. 50).

Spirituality may be viewed as an ongoing search for authentic, enduring, profound, holistic and deep understanding of the existential self, and includes finding a connection with something sacred (Karakas, 2010, p. 8). However, there seems to be various definitions of spirituality due to its complex nature (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 31), which makes research on it very challenging (Karakas, 2010, p. 8). Even so, spirituality improves employee well-being and therefore organisational performance. It gives work purpose, and develops a sense of community (Karakas, 2010, p. 20).

It was found that people may react differently to life's demands based on their concept of spirituality, as spirituality is thought to buffer stressful circumstances (Krok, 2008, p. 1). My experience of the current status in the traffic environment is that traffic officers may respond differently in the same stressful situation. Therefore, some may find that their work environment dictates their well-being, while others have somehow learned how not to be affected negatively by their circumstances.

There is a notion that people can overcome obstacles to happiness in their environment by employing thoughtful actions (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 1). These may include cultivating coping strategies to relieve stress (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 251). Coping involves the perceptual, mental or behavioural actions used by people to handle potentially stressful situations (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 383). Spirituality may also be useful in cultivating coping strategies (Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 321). A positive relationship exists between spirituality and coping ability, as people measuring high in spirituality seem to use positive thoughts and display stronger coping styles (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

The limitation in research lies in the selection of police officers as the preferred category of law enforcers (Anderson et al., 2002; Chopko, 2007; Louw & Viviers, 2010; Marais, 2002). However, given the established overlapping nature of the duties of police officers and traffic officers, it is still useful to consider findings from police research which are relevant to the current study.

The work of police officers involves a spiritual component which comes from fighting for the good, not being valued in the community, and threats to their lives (Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 320). Traffic officers share these challenges in that they may be attacked by angry motorists at any time, or may be targeted for their fire arms (Mushwana, 1998, p. 108). An inference may therefore be made that the spiritual component of a police officer's function may be important in the current study.

The general aim of this study is to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The proposed research is important as a need exists to broaden the study of spirituality in the workplace, and to explore further its potential benefits in the place of work (Bell, Rajendran & Theiler, 2012, p. 33). The lack of current research creates a worthy exploration field into the effect that traffic officers' spirituality may have on their ability to cope. In this study spirituality is considered the independent variable, and coping is considered the dependent variable.

Therefore, in preparation for the proposed study it was found that existing research with the traffic officer as a unit of analysis (Mushwana, 1998; Van Heerden, 1990) is fairly old. Other literature explores spirituality (Collett, 2011; Karakas, 2010; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008), but not from the perspective of a traffic officer. There is an existing gap in previous research because the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers has not yet been sufficiently explored. This research aims to address this gap by expanding the existing body of knowledge so as to consider the traffic officer's specific context. It can add value to the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, specifically employee and organisational wellness as well as career counselling.

This study links to the postmodern approach to career counselling, which is receiving

increasing attention (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 2). The traffic environment presents officers with more and more demands (Pienaar, 2007, p. 3), which challenges their ability to cope with stress (Pienaar, 2007, p. 93). Thus, the human aspects of the traffic profession require more attention (Pienaar, 2007, p. 5).

Should the topic be ignored, the employees and organisations involved will pay the price, such as stress related absenteeism and turnover, as well as costs to society (Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Cooper, 2010, p. 2). Unhealthy workers appear to be unproductive (Van Dick & Haslam, 2012, p. 2), and the cost to society in the context of the traffic environment may translate into poor service delivery. The benefits of addressing this topic through further research can help the employer to reduce or prevent the costs mentioned, through gaining a better understanding of wellness in traffic officers as it relates to the constructs of spirituality and coping.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

This study seeks to answer the question: '*What is the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers?*' It has been established that spirituality is regarded as an essential defence in stressful situations (Krok, 2008, p. 643). However, existing research with traffic officers (Mushwana, 1998; Van Heerden, 1990) is relatively old or studies spirituality from perspectives other than that of traffic officers' (Collett, 2011; Karakas, 2010; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008). Spirituality is a positive individual trait (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5) and initial positive psychological constructs, such as coping, were mostly studied in the nineties (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007, p. 485).

This research, therefore, assumed that the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers has not yet been sufficiently explored. It was also presupposed that spirituality may influence coping in traffic officers. To test the assumptions the stated question was linked with an exploratory qualitative approach. It was expected that this research will help fill the current gap in research by expanding the existing body of knowledge through exploring the role of spirituality in coping, with traffic officers as



the unit of analysis. It was also expected that this study will contribute to original research on a topic previously neglected in South African research.

The lack of research on the topic has resulted in employers not fully understanding the related experiences of members and their potential benefits to both employer and employee. This study unearths these benefits and contributes to the career counselling and guidance process – particularly the ability of individuals to adapt to career-related circumstances (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 3). In line with the above problem statement, the research was designed to answer several literature and empirical questions.

The research questions pertaining to the literature review explored how spirituality is conceptualised, how coping is conceptualised, and what the role is of spirituality in coping. The research questions pertaining to the empirical study explored how traffic officers experience spirituality in the workplace, how traffic officers experience coping in the workplace, and how the coping of traffic officers is influenced by spirituality.

### **1.3 AIMS**

The research aims are comprised of one general aim and various specific aims. The aims are formulated from the research questions introduced above.

#### **1.3.1 General aim**

The general aim of this research is to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. This requires an understanding and contextualisation of the concepts of spirituality and coping, as it pertain to the world of traffic officers.

### **1.3.2 Specific aims**

Specific aims pertaining to the literature review were to conceptualise spirituality, to conceptualise coping, as well as to explore the theoretical link between coping and spirituality in the place of work.

A specific aim pertaining to the empirical study was to gain a better understanding of how traffic officers experience the role of spirituality in coping within the South African context. The researcher also aimed to provide a framework that can assist with creating an understanding of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. Finally, the researcher aimed to formulate recommendations for possible future research on exploring the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers within the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology – specifically employee and organisational wellness, and career counselling.

## **1.4 THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE**

Paradigms are ‘systems of interrelated ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions’, which influence the research question and the way in which it will be explored (Durrheim, 2006, p. 40). Three paradigms are relevant to this study, two being theoretical paradigms and one being an empirical paradigm.

### **1.4.1 Theoretical paradigm**

The theoretical paradigm defines the perspective from which research was executed in terms of the types of concept under research, the types of measurement to be utilised, and the manner in which interpretations were to be made and applied (Bergh, 2009d, p. 438). The first construct is spirituality (Bell et al., 2012, p. 33), and the second construct is coping (Louw, & Viviers, 2010, p. 2). The literature review on spirituality and coping was presented from the humanistic paradigm and the postmodern paradigm. The two paradigms complement each other, as many founders of the humanistic treatment have advanced their thinking to include the altered outlook of postmodernism, as well as issues surrounding people living in the

spiritual paradigm (Lines, 2002, p. 102). Both paradigms draw on positive thinking, and persons with high spirituality have been shown to cope by holding more positive viewpoints (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

The Humanistic theoretical paradigm was appropriate to address the literature aims in terms of understanding or conceptualising spirituality, and the exploration into the person's unique perceptions (Bergh, 2009b, p. 316). Using ideas from phenomenology and existentialism, the approach examines the whole of the person's subjective experience (Bergh, 2009b, p. 317). Persons aspire to implement the self-concept across their lives, while searching for self-actualisation and their personal meaning of existence (McLeod, 2003, p. 142). The humanistic psychologies grew into a 'religion light', with a focus on what is good (Kvale, 2003, p. 20), and the ability to grow in life psychologically (Theron, 2009b, p. 8). Deeper exploration is possible since there is a trend within the humanistic paradigm to integrate spirituality concepts theoretically, and persons are deemed as capable of reflecting on their experiences (McLeod, 2003, p. 142). The holistic nature of Humanistic Psychology is needed to address such issues as health and spirituality (Aanstoos, 2003, p. 121).

The humanistic approach is based on a core set of theoretical assumptions, in which the person is viewed as 'striving to create, achieve or become' (McLeod, 2003, p. 142). These assumptions are outlined below according to Bergh (2009b, pp. 317-326):

- Becoming a person is viewed as a continuous rational process which stems from personal experiences and intentional choices made in the world, and taking responsibility for decisions made.
- Decision-making is rooted in free will.
- Based on its positive inclination, human beings are viewed as inherently good and filled with potential to grow and function optimally.
- Uniqueness of each individual's context and subjective experiences give meaning to life.

- The individual's context provides a framework in which the person is studied as a unique whole in relation to his or her mental, social, psychological and religious experiences in the world.

The human-existential view in the postmodern paradigm values complex human qualities like spirit, consciousness and life purpose (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 220). Kvale (2003, p. 21) stated that postmodern thought seeks to explain the human condition today, and that trends of resacralisation of the world are visible in a postmodern age. The postmodern paradigm is a transdisciplinary approach to viewing career behaviour, particularly the perceptions and experiences people have of their careers (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 162). Spirituality as a construct is subjective in nature, thus informed by perceptions, as individuals have their own grand narrative of what is real for them (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011, p. 421; Sharf, 2010, p. 181).

Further, since the postmodern paradigm is characterised by flexibility and change (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 218), it is a suitable theoretical framework from which to view coping as a construct. After all, the manner in which a person copes with change in the work environment influences his or her well-being while dealing with such change (Sharf, 2010, p. 107).

Assumptions of the postmodern approach complement the humanistic approach, and include the following:

- It rejects the idea of universal truths and homogeneity (Theron, 2009b, p. 11).
- Many 'truths' will emerge from the different experiences encountered (Theron, 2009b, p. 11; Thrift & Amundson, 2007, p. 45).
- Each person is unique, and will therefore have his or her own construct or perception of what is real for them (Sharf, 2010, p. 296).

### **1.4.2 Empirical paradigm**

The qualitative methods in the empirical research are described using the interpretive paradigm (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 7), in order to understand the subjective experiences of spirituality and coping. The paradigm binds the researcher to 'particular methods of data collection, observation, and interpretation' (Durrheim, 2006, p. 40).

A methodology of the heart was required with characteristics of truth (Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina, 2006, p. 770), and therefore the researcher considered the ontology as it relates to the nature of the reality being studied (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). In the interpretive paradigm the reality to be studied consists of people's internal reality of their external world, and the researcher therefore adopted an intersubjective epistemological stance toward that reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 7). Epistemology concerns the researcher-participant relationship (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131), which requires empathy and observer subjectivity to understand others through interacting and listening (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006, p. 276).

The practical implementation of the interpretive approach entailed the collection of data through interviews (Yin, 2010, p. 129), and identifying general themes as they transpired from these interviews (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006, p.323). The research questions served as the foundation for the analysis, in the quest for what needs to be known (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). The respondents' subjective experiences emerged from their stories, and the researcher employed inductive reasoning (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2010, p. 367; Yin, 2010, p. 94).

Data from interviews were analysed using content analysis, which was useful to reduce textual data into themes and meaningful sub-themes (Muchinsky, Kriek & Schreuder, 2009, p. 31). It involved a systematic process of getting to know the body of material, defining characteristics, breaking items down into more manageable items for analysis, and scrutinising material for qualities identified earlier (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 144). The objective was to bring meaning, structure, and order to the data (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). The data was deemed saturated once a

satisfactory understanding was obtained of the subject matter, as portrayed by the respondents (Kelly, 2006a, p. 372).

The basic assumptions of the interpretive paradigm rely upon the human instrument (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276), and are provided below:

- The interpretive paradigm aims to understand occurrences empathically and from within the particular context (Kelly, 2006c, p. 364). The researcher needed to study the phenomenon within the context of the traffic officers' personal and external environment, which may influence their experience of spirituality and coping in the workplace.
- The focus of the reality to be studied is on the internal and subjective experiences, and aims to explain the subjective meanings underpinning social actions (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 7). Traffic officers had to share their own truths regarding the role of spirituality in their coping, and the perceptions underpinning their behaviour in real life.
- Concepts are understood through studying the interactions between individuals (Bergh, 2009d, p. 439). The researcher learned from the participants (Yin, 2010, p. 263) as they interacted and conversed during the interviews.
- Babbie and Mouton's study (2009, as cited in Du Toit, 2010, p. 10) stated that the paradigm focuses on the human mind, and that individuals constantly construct, develop and alter their views of their worlds. The researcher had to focus on the constructions of traffic officers concerning how they view spirituality and coping.

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Qualitative research designs denote strategic plans of how research is carried out in terms of data collection and reporting on findings, in order to be relevant and valid (Bergh, 2009d, p. 439; McMillan, & Schumacher, 2010, p. 321). Guided by the research questions formulated earlier, the research design is presented according to the research approach, strategy and method described.

### **1.5.1 Research approach**

The qualitative approach guided the quest to understand the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers from an interpretive perspective (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 273). The overall purpose of this research was therefore explorative in nature. In line with the qualitative tradition, the interpretive approach informed data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). Data was collected using in-depth interviews, and the data was analysed by categorising themes that emerged (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Muchinsky et al., 2009, p. 31).

Within the interpretive perspective the human is viewed as instrument, and it is assumed that individuals may hold multiple truths (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135). The interpretive approach is congruent with the subjective realities being studied (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 134), and also serves the intersubjective epistemological stance adopted towards that reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 7).

The researcher's relationship with the participants was interactional (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129), and researcher empathy was employed (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 6). Opening questions were posed to reach the related empirical aims, and realities were then constructed by the research participants (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). Thus, while some common understanding about spirituality should be apparent, eventually the meaning of the term spirituality differed from one person to the next, according to their perceptions (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009). The interpretive approach suited the deduction of meaning in order to answer the research question.

### **1.5.2 Research strategy**

This research strategy was interpretive as it relied on the subjective experiences and realities constructed by the research participants (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). The interpretive strategy is congruent with the theoretical assumptions underpinning this study and made it possible to answer the research question. Hence, an inductive process was used to make sense of the subjective experiences within their unique

contexts, as constructed by them in their in-depth interviews (Bergh, 2009d, p. 439; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011). Units of analysis were comprised of traffic officers. In this qualitative research, no preconceived notions were held of what needed to be explored. As the design evolved, the more was learned about the research question from the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

### **1.5.3 Research method**

The interpretive research method is concerned with the human experience of phenomena as they are revealed in conscious lived experience (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131; Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276). The researcher conducted an extensive literature review (Chapter 2) only after the data was analysed, in an attempt to be more objective during the process of content analysis. This is appropriate as qualitative research permits more flexibility in strategies than quantitative research, given that the design is revealed as data is collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 12).

The research process involved determining the question to study, a preliminary literature review, deciding which qualitative research method to use, collecting the data, analysing the data, conducting a literature review, reporting on the data, and reaching conclusions. The steps below (Figure 1.1) illustrate how the qualitative research study was conducted.



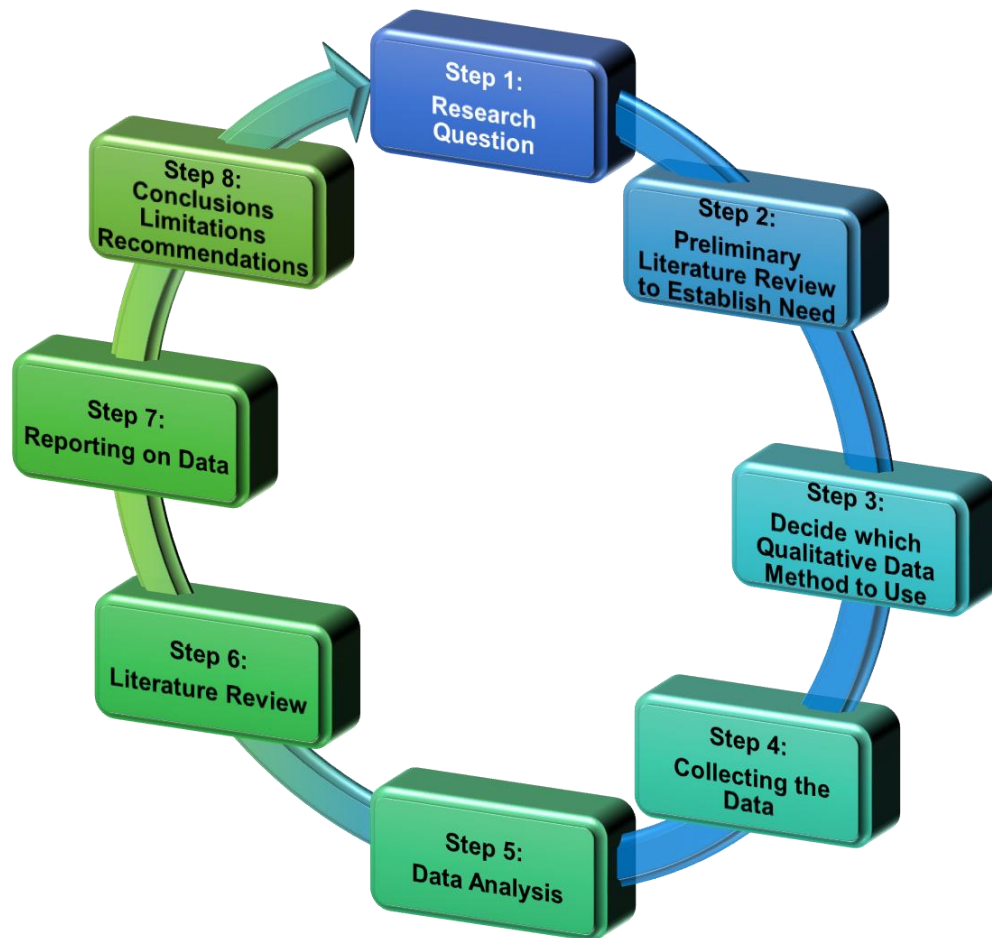


Figure 1.1: Steps to follow in the research method

Aspects pertaining to the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, data collection methods, recording of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure quality data, and reporting of findings are discussed in detail next.

### 1.5.3.1 Research setting

The research setting is the traffic law enforcement environment, with the traffic officer as subject of interest. Administrative duties are carried out in the Law enforcement Section within the Traffic Services. Actual law enforcement duties take place on public roads according to the area of jurisdiction. Given their inherent roles and responsibilities (Criminal Procedure Act, 1977; National Road Traffic Act, 1996), the work environment of traffic officers is very demanding (Pienaar, 2007, p. 3). For

this reason, interviews took place where respondents felt relaxed to share experiences in a natural manner (Kelly, 2006b, p. 317; Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276), and primarily away from their work environment to avoid interruptions (Kelly, 2006b, p. 298).

#### *1.5.3.2 Entrée and establishing researcher roles*

Ethical clearance was provided by the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology of the University of South Africa (see Annexure D). Informative letters were also provided to the prospective authorities (see Annexure C) to promote transparency and to inform them of the intended study and its purpose. One potential organisation acknowledged receipt of such an informative letter.

The researcher fulfilled an empathetic and subjective role, so that respondents felt comfortable to explore in depth their related experiences (Kelly, 2006b, p. 295; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 6). There was bias because the researcher shared previous working roles with the participants, and was a colleague and/or senior to some traffic officers. Strong and exclusive bonds are formed in the traffic fraternity, therefore the researcher could employ this familiarity to aid traffic officers to freely share experiences, as they trusted the researcher's personal insight into their challenges. The researcher eliminated some of the bias by having respondents comment on results to ensure that the data captured was an accurate reflection of their narrative evidence provided (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006, p. 93; Yin, 2010, p. 274).

#### *1.5.3.3 Sampling*

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants, and is a non-probability sampling method. The sample was chosen based on the willingness to participate voluntarily, and the ability to provide adequate and meaningful information on the research topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). The criterion for inclusion in the sample was that law enforcement officers must be either current or retired traffic officers. The age, race, and gender of traffic officers were provided on the finalisation

of the sample. A sample size of ten traffic officers was used, and once no new themes emerged from the respondents, the data was considered saturated (Kelly, 2006a, p. 371). As the aim was not to generalise the results of this study, a representative sample was not required (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2009).

#### *1.5.3.4 Data collection methods*

Data was gathered using in-depth interviews, and the method of data collection was suitable to answer the research question. It served to elicit detailed relevant meaning from the respondents so as to understand the topic within context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 322; Van de Vyver, 2010, p. 52). Interviews were conducted where the respondents felt comfortable to interact in a natural way (Kelly, 2006b, p. 317; Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276) in order to ascertain how the constructs of spirituality and coping are conceptualised by them.

To encourage sharing of in-depth information that meets the research aims, the researcher asked open-ended questions, such as *'How do you experience spirituality or religion in the workplace?'* Interviews were conducted at locations which were free from interruptions (Kelly, 2006b, p. 298). The process followed is provided in the interview schedule (see Annexure B), and entailed preparing for the interview, preparing the applicant, obtaining consent to record the interview, asking the open-ended questions, and ending the interview (Kelly, 2006b, p. 297). The estimated time per participant was one hour per interview. Data collected was converted into transcriptions which were offered to participants for verification in proposed follow-up interviews.

#### *1.5.3.5 Recording of data*

Participants had to give informed consent (see Annexure A) that data from the interviews may be recorded with a tape recorder (Wassenaar, 2009, p. 60). Measures were taken to make sure that data was collected in an unbiased, ethical, and credible manner (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Hence, the digital recordings ensured comprehensive verbal communications and provided text for reliability

checks (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Interviews were conducted in secure settings, where only the researcher and the respondent were present (Kelly, 2006b, p. 298). Transcriptions were made only by the researcher, thus ensuring confidential treatment of information.

#### *1.5.3.6 Data analysis*

Textual data was collected and therefore data from interviews were analysed using content analysis, and thereafter the content was reduced into meaningful categories (Muchinsky et al., 2009, p.322). The researcher analysed the content through a process of immersion of text, forming themes, coding, elaboration, interpretation and checking of data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 322). This process also involved breaking items down into more manageable items for analysis, and scrutinising material for qualities identified earlier (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 144). General themes were identified as they transpired from the interviews (Durrheim, 2006, p. 323).

The research questions formed the foundation for the analysis, in the quest for what needs to be known (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). In this manner, meaning, structure, and order was brought to the data (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). Analysis within the interpretive perspective assumes that the reality being explored is that of people's subjective experiences and therefore inductive reasoning was used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 367). The researcher was a part of the research process through her subjective interaction with the respondents, and in being the primary person responsible for data analysis as well (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276).

#### *1.5.3.7 Strategies employed to ensure quality data*

As stated, the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and analysing data, thus contributing towards trustworthiness between researcher and respondent. Informed consent was obtained from the traffic officers who voluntarily showed interest in contributing toward the study (see Annexure A). To obtain quality data, the researcher fulfilled a subjective role and made respondents comfortable to share in-

depth experiences by listening attentively to them and interacting with them empathetically (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276). In the initial stages already, the researcher ensured the anonymity of respondents (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 101). Participants were assured that participation was voluntary and that the confidentiality of the data was guaranteed. The researcher stored the information and was the only person with access to it, thereby ensuring the integrity of the research data, research quality and compliance to ethical considerations.

The quality of the data was optimised firstly through recording the interviews, so that accurate accounts were obtained of the experiences (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009). Secondly, participants were referred to as 'Candidate A' and 'Candidate B' in the completed data. Finally, to ensure reliability, theoretical views from a range of widely accessible literature sources were consulted (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009; Yin, 2010, p. 155).

Kelly (2006a, p. 378) stated that the term 'reliability' is useful in qualitative research, as it translates into the question: *'Have I reliably given voice to your experience?'* Reliability was ensured by considering a wide variety of accessible literature sources, and by having participants validate transcriptions themselves (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009; Yin, 2010, p. 274).

Transferability denotes the extent to which research findings can provide answers in different contexts (Kelly, 2006a, p. 381). Transferability was ensured by carefully selecting the participants through purposive sampling, and by providing a detailed description of the research context as described previously (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 30).

Dependability was ensured by means of an audit trail and triangulation (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 30). The audit trail comprised keeping record of how data was managed (Kelly, 2006a, p. 376; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 334; Yin, 2010, p. 29). Triangulation entailed checking that findings about the participants' perceptions were correct representations of their individual views, and by conversing with traffic officers on two or more occasions (Kelly, 2006a, p. 380; Yin, 2010, p. 153).

#### *1.5.3.8 Reporting*

Data was reported on so as to address the empirical aims of the study, being: to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers; to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon; and providing a framework that can assist in understanding the relationship between the two constructs. The empirical aims entailed the formulation of recommendations for possible future research. The research findings were reported on by using a qualitative writing style.

An inductive approach guided the processing of the raw data, and made it possible to merge the research question with the findings from the data (Durrheim, 2006, p. 40). The themes that emerged from the study were presented in a conclusion about the phenomenon that was studied, findings were related to existing knowledge, and implications stated (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 142). Thus, findings were reported on in a responsible and transparent manner (Yin, 2010, p. 19), and a reliable reflection of the participants' subjective experiences was possible.

### **1.6 LIMITATIONS**

Potential limitations related to bias, in that the researcher used to be a colleague of some of the participants, and she is very familiar with the organisational setting. She is qualified as a traffic officer and has extensive working experiences as both an officer and a manager. This familiarity, however, allowed the researcher to gain access to, and elicit participation from otherwise very reluctant and exclusive groups.

Bias may possibly have resulted from the purposive sampling method, given that participants were chosen based on their willingness to provide meaningful information on the research topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). Thus, it may be that only spiritual-minded individuals volunteered. Further, the researcher's relationship with participants involved subjective interaction (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 276) and she was the primary person responsible for data analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135). The researcher used the pre-established

trust between researcher and participant to eliminate some of the bias by having respondents comment on results in order to validate findings.

Further, if participants were only available from a single Traffic Services Centre, the generalisability of the findings, in relation to other organisations of the same kind, may have been compromised. However, this study was qualitative in nature and the researcher strived rather for transferability of findings, due to the strong limits on generalisability (Kelly, 2006a, p. 381).

## **1.7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Possible recommendations included the replication of the study using respondents from more South African Traffic Services Centres. The study is intended to contribute to the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, in particular the subfields of employee and organisational wellness (Luthans, 2008) and career counselling (Muchinsky et al., 2009, p. 4). The enhanced understanding of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers could possibly assist traffic managers, human resource practitioners and industrial and organisational psychologists to facilitate the optimal psychological well-being of the employees and aid their adjustment in the workplace (Bergh, 2009c, p. 400). This knowledge can also inform career counselling practices, so as to address the individual's career-related issues in organisations, as well as non-work influencing factors that lead to career conflict (Bergh, 2009a, p. 22).

## **1.8 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The chapters are presented in the manner described below.

### **Chapter One: Scientific orientation to the research**

This chapter provides a scientific overview of the research on exploring the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The background and motivation for the study is given. The problem statement consists of research questions pertaining to the literature review and the empirical study. It provides a discussion on what is lacking in current literature and how the phenomenon manifests in the workplace. The aims of the research consist of general aims, and specific aims which are presented according to the literature review and the empirical study. This chapter describes the need for the research and potential benefits to the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

The paradigm perspective is presented that bound the researcher to specific methods applicable to data collection, observation, and interpretation. This section explains the paradigms from the literature review and the empirical research, from which the constructs will be presented. The research design is discussed in terms of its theoretical perspectives and assumptions pertaining to the collection of data and reporting on findings. It is presented according to the research approach, strategy and method. This chapter concludes with possible limitations and recommendations envisaged for research.

### **Chapter Two: Literature review**

Chapter Two conceptualises the constructs of spirituality and coping. The theoretical foundations of the two constructs are investigated. A critical analysis is provided of how the constructs have developed, and related pertinent theories are discussed. The chapter then explores existing literature on the concepts of spirituality and coping, the role of spirituality in coping, as well as research related to the unit of analysis.



### **Chapter Three: Article**

This chapter is presented in the format of an article and presents the theoretical background pertaining to the empirical study. The qualitative data analysis is presented according to the themes that emerged, and the results of the study are discussed. The chapter ends by drawing conclusions from the data, stating the limitations of the study, and providing recommendations for the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and future research.

### **Chapter Four: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations**

This chapter presents the results of the study and the conclusions reached. An explanation is given of the limitations of the study and recommendations are formulated for the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology. Finally, recommendations are made for future research, and the research is integrated by means of concluding comments.

### **1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In Chapter One the scientific orientation to the research was discussed. This contained the background and motivation, the research problem, aims, the paradigm perspective, and the research design and methodologies employed in this study. The motivation for the research included exploring the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. It is expected that the results from this study will aid traffic managers, human resource practitioners and industrial psychologists to facilitate optimal psychological well-being of the employees, as well as to inform career counselling practices. The chapter ended with the chapter layout.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW ON EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE COPING OF TRAFFIC OFFICERS**

Chapter Two contains a literature review on spirituality and coping. The specific aims pertaining to the literature review were to conceptualise the constructs of spirituality and coping, and to explore the theoretical link between coping and spirituality in the place of work. The existing literature and applicable approaches have been revised for distinguishing factors and shared views. This chapter concludes with the practical implications of these constructs for employee and organisational wellness, as well as career counselling.

#### **2.1 DISCIPLINARY FOUNDATION**

A theoretical framework reflects key concepts, definitions and relationships pertaining to the development of constructs (Kaniki, 2006, p. 20), as do the disciplinary foundation. The constructs are studied within the disciplinary context of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (Muchinsky et al., 2009, p. 4). Subfields include employee and organisational wellness (Luthans, 2008), as well as career psychology and counselling (Muchinsky et al., 2009, p. 4).

##### **2.1.1 Industrial and Organisational Psychology**

Industrial and Organisational Psychology is a speciality area of Psychology (Muchinsky et al., 2009, p. 4). This connection is very important as there are areas of Industrial and Organisational Psychology that cannot be separated from Psychology (Strümpfer, 2007, p. 1).

The field of Industrial Psychology was created through a publication by Hugo Münsterberg in 1913 (Van Daalen & Odendaal, 2008, p. 425). Accordingly, the argument of Münsterberg entails the scientific study of human behaviour to explain individual differences, to better link individual abilities and job requirements. In a

nutshell, Industrial and Organisational Psychology studies the behaviour of people at work (Cascio & Aguinis, 2011, p. 3). Similarly, this study explores the behaviour of traffic officers, and the role of spirituality in their ability to cope with all the demands of their internal and external workplace.

### **2.1.2 Employee and organisational wellness**

Employee and organisational wellness is a subfield in Industrial and Organisational Psychology, and is contained in the organisation's health policies and wellness plans (Bergh, 2009a, p. 22). Accordingly, this field involves the optimal psychological well-being of the worker (May, 2009, p. 351), and entails wellness or health and adjustment, as well as maladjustment and impaired work performance (Bergh, 2009c, p. 372).

Spiritual components form part of psychological well-being (Roothman, Kirsten & Wissing, 2003, p. 212), and are acknowledged in holistic views of health (Kirsten, van der Walt & Viljoen, 2009). Psychological well-being is linked to physical, affective, cognitive, social, spiritual and self-aspects (Roothman et al., 2003, p. 212). The holistic view of health, well-being and wellness acknowledges the spiritual component of the human being (Kirsten et al., 2009, p. 153). This holistic perspective is further evident from the interrelationships that are studied between psychological factors and physical health in Health Psychology (Cascio & Aguinis, 2011).

In the diverse South African workforce organisations must take note of the important aspects which could affect the well-being of employees, such as work conditions (Luthans, 2011, p. 144; Van Daalen & Odendaal, 2008, p. 425). Therefore, it is also necessary to pay attention to the work conditions of traffic officers, as these may affect their well-being and ability to cope with inherent job demands.

### **2.1.3 Career counselling**

Career counselling examines the individual's career development issues, employment and unemployment, career-related aspects in organisations and also

non-work related factors that lead to career conflict (Bergh, 2009a, p. 22). It comprises guidance processes, and more specifically the ability of individuals to adapt to circumstances affecting their careers (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 3). Thus, this study aims to add value to career counselling practices in its exploration of career-related concerns in the traffic work environment, as well as personal factors in their lives, which may affect how they cope with factors affecting their profession.

## **2.2 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS**

This section discusses the conceptual terms of 'traffic officer', the scope of the traffic officer and the traffic officer's work environment within the context of this study.

### **2.2.1 Traffic officer**

Traffic officers are appointed in terms of the National Road Traffic Act (1996), and also as peace officers in terms of the Criminal Procedure Act (1977). Therefore, the discussion on traffic officers requires consideration of the following definitions as provided by the National Road Traffic Act (1996):

'Authorised officer' means an inspector of licences, examiner of vehicles, examiner for driving licences or traffic officer, and also any other person declared by the Minister by regulation to be an authorised officer, from time to time.

'Inspector of licences' means an inspector of licences appointed in terms of the laws of any province.

'Traffic officer' means a traffic officer appointed under Section 3A and any member of the Service, and any member of the a municipal police service both as defined in section 1 of the South African Police Service Act, 1995 (Act No. 68 of 1995), and for the purposes of

Chapters V, IX, XI and sections 74 and 78 of this Act includes a peace officer.

Traffic officers, according to section 334 of the Criminal Procedure Act (1977), are declared as peace officers for specific purposes (Gazette No. 34583, Regulation 707). The schedule to this notice is given below (Table 2.1), describing the category of peace officer in column one, the specified area in column two, the purpose of the peace officer as per the offences specified in column three, and the powers defined in column four.

**Table 2.1:**

Schedule to Notice (Gazette No. 34583, Regulation 707)

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
A traffic officer appointed in terms of section 3A(1)(a) of the National Road Traffic Act, 1996 (Act No. 93 of 1996).	The Republic of South Africa.	Any offence.	(i) All powers conferred upon a peace officer in terms of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977.  (ii) All powers conferred upon a police official in terms of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977, excluding the powers provided for in terms of sections 25, 43, 59 and 179(1)(b):  Provided that the powers conferred upon a police official in terms of section 72 of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977, may be exercised only for the purposes contemplated in section 55(2) of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977.

Thus, traffic officers are authorised officers as appointed under the National Road Traffic Act (1996), as well as peace officers as per the Criminal Procedure Act (1977). These Acts primarily prescribe their duties and powers as discussed in the following section.

## **2.2.2 The scope of the traffic officer**

The context within which the traffic officer functions stems firstly from their appointment in terms of the National Road Traffic Act (1996). An authorised officer may only exercise his or her powers or perform any duty when in possession of his or her certificate of appointment. Some of these duties are described next, as provided by this Act.

Their duties include inspecting any vehicle for compliance with the provisions of this Act, and to temporarily forbid a person from driving a vehicle should that person seem incapable. They may control and regulate traffic on any public road, which may include the closing of any public road, and directing the driver to remove the vehicle from such a road and to follow another route with the vehicle. Traffic officers may require any person to furnish any particulars needed for identification, under circumstances prescribed. They may, when in uniform, instruct a driver of a vehicle to stop the vehicle. Traffic officers may drive any vehicle where necessary in the performance of their duties, if licensed to drive a motor vehicle of the class concerned.

Section 3I provides that a traffic officer may also, subject to the provisions of this Act or any other law, exercise any of the powers or duties conferred upon an inspector of licences under section 3F. This includes using the prescribed written notice to direct an owner, operator, driver or person in charge of any vehicle, to present a vehicle which they suspect to be non-roadworthy, for inspection, examination or testing to an appropriately graded testing station.

Secondly, traffic officers are appointed as peace officers in terms of section 334(1)(a) of the Criminal Procedure Act (1977) as described. These duties include all powers bestowed upon peace officers and all powers awarded to police officials, but with the exclusion of specified sections and/or subject to certain provisions.

From the above, it is evident that traffic officers need to execute duties which may lead to stressful experiences. Furthermore, studies on policing and stress also

indicate that police work is indeed stressful (Anderson, Litzemberger & Plecas, 2002, p. 399). The overlapping nature of traffic officer and police duties is evident, and it can be inferred that traffic officers may inherit the related pressures that accompany these bestowed police tasks. The scope of traffic officers described above contributes to their unique traffic work environment, and the next section describes some inherent demands.

### **2.2.3 Traffic officer work environment**

As mentioned earlier, the context within which the traffic officer functions stems firstly from their appointment in terms of the National Road Traffic Act (1996), and secondly from their appointment as peace officer in terms of the Criminal Procedure Act (1977).

Section 3A of the National Road Traffic Act (1996) deals with the appointment of officers, according to which the chief executive officer may appoint traffic officers. The MEC may, upon the conditions set by the chief executive officer, appoint traffic officers for the province concerned, and a local authority which is a registering authority.

The traffic officer's work environment includes the Law Enforcement Section within the Traffic Services, where the officer carries out administrative duties. Typically, a work environment presents members with internal organisational stressors, such as rotating work shifts, untrusting cultures, tight controls, not being part of decision-making processes, and work conditions (Luthans, 2011, p. 251). Traffic officers spend the majority of their workday outside in society doing law enforcement (Pienaar, 2007, p. 60), therefore their work conditions outside also require consideration.

Actual law enforcement is done on all the public roads (National Road Traffic Act, 1996) within the boundaries of a particular local municipal area or provincial area as the case may be. Since traffic officers exercise their duties on public roads, the following definition from the National Road Traffic Act (1996), is of significance:

'Public road' means any road, street or thoroughfare or any other place (whether a thoroughfare or not) which is commonly used by the public or any section thereof or to which the public or any section thereof has a right of access, and includes (a) the verge of any such road, street or thoroughfare; (b) any bridge, ferry or drift traversed by any such road, street or thoroughfare; and (c) any other work or object forming part of or connected with or belonging to such road, street or thoroughfare...

Extra organisational stressors refer to factors outside the organisation that affect employees, such as societal issues and community conditions (Luthans, 2011, p. 282). Traffic officers have one-on-one contact with the public and are therefore confronted with these extra organisational stressors or societal problems (Pienaar, 2007, p. 60). Thus, in their external work environment they deal with the public as road users (Pienaar, 2007, p. 60), as well as work conditions such as heat, cold, unsafe and dangerous circumstances, polluted air, together with physical and mental strain (Luthans, 2008, p. 251). More specific details on the traffic officer's work environment are dealt with later in this chapter, when the related constructs are discussed specific to their place of work.

The conceptual foundations above relate to the traffic officer's world of work. It provides an appropriate background against which to explore the theoretical constructs of spirituality and coping as will be discussed next.



## **2.3 TRENDS FROM RESEARCH LITERATURE**

This section aims to conceptualise the constructs of spirituality and coping, as well as to explore the theoretical link between coping and spirituality in the place of work.

### **2.3.1 Spirituality**

A view is presented of spirituality in general by considering a few definitions from literature, which will inform the specific view adopted for the current study.

#### *2.3.1.1 Spirituality in general*

Literature indicates that societal trends show a growing interest in spirituality in the workplace (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009, p. 230). The word 'spirituality' is derived from the Latin 'spiritualitas', which is associated with 'spiritus' and 'spiritualis' (Kourie, 2009, p. 155). Spirituality or spiritual well-being is located in the field of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5), and feelings of well-being are included in positive emotions (Strümpfer, 2006, p. 146). Positive emotions are of relevance in studies on spirituality, as individuals measuring high in spirituality seem to apply positive thoughts in dealing with their world (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

Spirituality can be defined as the journey by which individuals search for an authentic, lasting, meaningful, holistic and deep understanding of their existential self, as well as discovering how they connect with that which is sacred (Karakas, 2010, p. 8). Hence, spirituality gives the worker a sense of interconnectedness, and a feeling that work has purpose and meaning (Karakas, 2010, p. 2).

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for self-actualisation, which includes this sense of connectedness with people, drives certain individuals (Theron, 2009a, p. 132). The view of Baruch on spiritual purpose is that it is driven by a desire to find deeper meaning, as well as a pursuit of creative self-expression through work activities (2004, as cited in Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007, p. 60). Thus, one's

subjective career assumes greater importance when the individuals perceive their career as a calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 1).

Coetzee and Roythorne-Jacobs (2012, p. 220) also describe how purpose is created in work, by viewing career as a calling in congruence with a 'heart-felt passion'. This driving force or passion with which some individuals approach their careers, is inspired by a person's unique combination of talents, interests and values (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 220).

The classification of spirituality may include the belief in a higher power, and coming to understand life through lived experience (Jacobs, 2013, p. 160). In this regard Waaijman (2006, p. 5) stated that spirituality entails an essential element of being affected by God, so that people and their situations are changed. Thus, spirituality also entails how an individual lives and experiences the Divine in this world, and how they then express these experiences in the form of actions and attitudes adopted and not adopted (Lombaard, 2011, p. 77).

Individuals who adopt spirituality find themselves exploring ethical aspects – wrong and right, or appropriate and less appropriate – which changes the person as well as their communities or environments (Kourie, 2009, p. 168). Thus, spirituality may develop an increased awareness (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 220), which may increase behaviour that is ethical and moral (Naidoo, 2014, p. 1).

It seems that spirituality is indeed a complex term, and that there is no single way to adequately define it (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 220; Jacobs, 2013, p. 1; Naidoo, 2014, p. 4). The ambiguities entrenched in this subjective construct renders research on it very difficult (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011, p. 421; Karakas, 2010, p. 8). This is because people's explanations of spirituality differ depending on communities and culture, and the post-modern way is to acknowledge and value all these different perspectives and truths on spirituality (Jacobs, 2013, p. 164).

It seems that the post-modern understanding of humankind emphasises the interconnectedness of all living things (Kourie, 2009, p. 152), and informs how the

various spiritualities manifest in daily living (Jacobs, 2013, p. 143). Welzen (2011, p. 38) concurred that studies on spirituality should include a reflection on lived spirituality. In line with all the different perspectives above, the next section considers the two terms of spirituality and religion together with their differences, as reflected through literature.

### *2.3.1.2 Differentiating between spirituality and religion*

Although the aim of this study may not be to distinguish between spirituality and religion, it is useful to include this distinction due to the ongoing debates, the overlapping nature, and therefore the potential benefits of both towards the individual's well-being (Collet, 2011, p. 59). Some literature indicates that there are many different spiritualities (Jacobs, 2013, p. 143; Welzen, 2011, p. 37). These differences seem to originate from, and form the frameworks of the various religions in which they are grounded (Jacobs, 2013, p. 144).

Religious frameworks may include Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and traditional African religions (Jacobs, 2013, p. 145), each putting forward its specific truths. The classification of spirituality may include the belief in a higher power, or a religiously grounded belief in God with associated customs (Jacobs, 2013, p. 160). Thus, the humanistic psychologies are useful as they grew into a 'religion light', emphasising that which is good (Kvale, 2003, p. 20).

Even though there seems to be no clear definition of spirituality, it has come to be an essential concept in people's lives (Jacobs, 2013, p. 143). However, I would contend that perhaps a clear definition does exist, and that it is rather a question of whether there is a common definition understood by all. Hence, perhaps rather there are too many people defining spirituality differently.

The varying definitions may be attributed to people's narratives or life stories (Sharf, 2010, p. 181), as they inform the meaning people attach to events in their lives. For many, their narratives may be rooted in or influenced by Biblical spirituality (Welzen, 2011, p. 37). Although some literature indicates that spirituality is not bound to a

specific religious approach (Jacobs, 2013, p. 144), many people view spirituality and religion as one and the same (Christian, 2003, p. 97).

Spirituality differs from religion as it is more inclusive and not dependent on a person's denomination, as opposed to being restricted by a particular religious body's convictions and practices (Karakas, 2010, p. 8). However, spirituality may be linked to religion for some, and for others not. Those who do not view it as the same, would typically not be able to associate themselves with traditional or organised religion, due to factors such as autocratic systems which dominate religion (Kourie, 2009, p. 152).

The reasons why some people shy away from religion create further distinctions between spirituality and religion, and include commitment to a certain ideology, failure of systems to encourage critical thoughts, viewing scriptures as laws, and unequal treatment of women (Kourie, 2009, p. 153). This may include secular spirituality which is free from well-established religious traditions (Waaijman, 2006, p. 8).

Literature also reflects the middle route, where spirituality and religion need not be rivals (Kourie, 2009, p. 153; Rowe & Allen, 2003). Studies on spirituality and coping may apply both concepts of spirituality and religion interchangeably (Rowe & Allen, 2003). This middle route informs the view of spirituality adopted for this study, which is described next.

### *2.3.1.3 Specific view adopted for the purpose of this research*

Spirituality is defined as individuals' experiences of the Divine (Lombaard, 2011, p. 77) on their journey of meaningful authentic self-discovery (Karakas, 2010, p. 8), and entails how they express these experiences through actions and attitudes (Lombaard, 2011, p. 77). This view informs the specific aim pertaining to the literature review, which seeks to conceptualise spirituality so as to enhance our understanding of this construct within the place of work.

#### *2.3.1.4 Linking spirituality to the place of work in general*

Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004, p. 28) prefer the term 'spirit at work', as it is a useful stance to elude the debate that exists in literature around religion and spirituality. The definition of work has changed from one denoting survival, to work involving livelihood, and organisations can increase commitment by introducing discussions about soul and spirit in the workplace (Naidoo, 2014, p. 1).

Spirituality relates to the place of work for it appears that 'spirit at work' originates inside the individual (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 29). This entails a new consciousness of the worth of spirituality which increases creativity as well as genuineness in communication (Naidoo, 2014, p. 6). 'Spirit at work' also entails a type of spirit or energy in some people that appears to motivate them to persevere in serving others, regardless of life's challenges (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 28).

Introducing spirituality to the workplace holds potential benefits, such as enhanced employee well-being (Karakas, 2010, p. 6). Workplace spirituality may also develop leaders so that their behaviour is guided by personal truth, integrity and ethical considerations (Naidoo, 2014, p. 1). However, it also holds concerns such as discrimination due to spiritual beliefs (Karakas, 2010, p. 26). This relates to the work of Ali and Gibbs, in which they stated that the work ethic and performance of believers relate to the Ten Commandments in Judaism, Christianity and Islam (1998, as cited in Naidoo, 2014, p. 3).

Spirit at work comprises interpersonal, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual characteristics, and this definite state entails physiological stimulation and positive affect (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 26). Spirit at work incorporates intense feelings of well-being, the trust that your work improves the world, the recognition of a connection to a higher power, and a feeling of excellence (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008, p. 319).

Mohan and Uys (2006, p. 58) studied the spiritual perspectives of people at work, and found the following:

- Spirituality involves a relationship from which they draw strength, in order to cope with life's challenges. Spiritual growth in this regard allows the person to cope with the hardships of life.
- This relationship involves a connection with a higher force that provides direction and solutions to their lives.
- It is important for them to sustain this connection to a higher power by feeding their inner world through prayer, reflecting on their lives, and meditation.
- Adopting a spiritual perspective to life allows them to see the meaning of events that occur in their lives. Persons who view work from a spiritual perspective seem to find purpose in their work, and believe that their inner world creates their external realities, in which they cherish authentic and balanced living.
- Relationships are very important to them because they view people as equal spiritually, thus organisations will benefit from these individuals' abilities to deal with conflict effectively.

Thus, despite the various views on spirituality in the place of work, the benefits of spirituality in the workplace seem to outweigh the disadvantages (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009, p. 2). Spirituality enhances organisational performance by improving employee well-being, giving meaning to work, and creating a sense of community (Karakas, 2010, p. 20).

The gap in research is that it seldom considers other categories of law enforcers, apart from police officers (Anderson et al., 2002; Chopko, 2007; Louw & Viviers, 2010; Marais, 2002). Existing research with traffic officers (Mushwana, 1998; Van Heerden, 1990) is fairly old. Mushwana (1998) studied the job involvement and job satisfaction of traffic officers, which includes the need people have to realise their own potential and grow continuously. The contribution of Van Heerden (1990) to the study of traffic officers is discussed in the section to follow. Other studies explored

spirituality (Collett, 2011; Karakas, 2010; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008), but not from the perspective of a traffic officer.

Police officers seem to be a preferential law enforcement category in research on spirituality or religion (Joubert & Grobler, 2013; Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003). Since human context influences how people deal with the world around them (Moos, 2002, p. 67), it may therefore be valuable to explore the concept of spirituality from the unique perspective of a traffic officer. In light of all the above, it is also important to explore the construct of coping.

### **2.3.2 Coping**

This section explores related literature on coping in general, with the aim of adopting a specific view on coping for the purpose of this study.

#### *2.3.2.1 Coping in general*

A valuable theoretical framework to enhance our understanding of human behaviour is the control theory or cybernetics (Edwards, 1992, p. 238). The key concept entails the interrelated negative feedback loop which reduces inconsistencies between environmental factors and desired states (Cheng, Mauno & Lee, 2014, p. 74; Edwards, 1992, p. 238).

The negative feedback loop reflects the process of stress in which differences between perceptions and desires negatively affect psychological and physical well-being, which in turn triggers coping and then influences the causes of stress (Edwards, 1992, p. 256). Coping affects well-being when individuals alter either, their perceptions and desires associated with inconsistencies or, the significance of inconsistencies (Edwards, 1992, p. 257). Coping strategies can either alter the distressed relationship between person and environment, or regulate emotional distress (Boehmer, Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2007, p. 63). The appropriateness of the type of coping strategy depends on the particular situation (Boehmer et al., 2007, p. 61).

Literature on coping in Psychology may adopt a trait-based approach, where coping becomes a stable behaviour once acquired (Edwards, 1998, p. 241). Another approach assumes that coping is part of the emotional process, and entails ways of dealing with problem situations (Ryan, Rapley & Dziurawiec, 2014, p. 1068).

The above two broad approaches differ regarding the amount of consideration given to contextual factors versus individual-level factors, although both view coping ability in terms of the presence or absence of coping skills (Ryan et al., 2014, p. 1069). Despite ongoing debates about the role that intra-individual and socioeconomic aspects play in the development of the ability to handle stress, social factors emerged as a key contributing factor (Ryan et al., 2014, p. 1068).

In general, coping refers to the perceptual, mental or behavioural efforts that people employ to deal with situations deemed potentially difficult and stressful (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 383). One such behavioural coping effort comprises the ability to respond to the needs of others in an understanding manner, which helps them maintain and build social connections with others (Krishnakumar, Narine, Soonthorndhada & Thianlai, 2014, p. 21).

Social connections are important in any setting, therefore Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2013, p. 803) explored adaptive and maladaptive coping among academics. Adaptive coping included strategising on how to solve problems, seeking comfort with others, self-encouragement and commitment to the task. Maladaptive coping included confusion, mental avoidance of challenges, concealing negative occurrences, self-pity, and blaming others (Skinner et al., 2013, p. 814).

Thus, individuals choose coping strategies to relieve the impact of organisational stressors on well-being (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 74). Therefore, the next section considers coping in the workplace, and stressors affecting organisations.



### *2.3.2.2 Coping in the place of work*

Stressors from outside organisations include: changes in the economy, the effects of family on the community, technology, globalisation, as well as race and gender influences (Luthans, 2011, p. 282). Stressors from within organisations include red tape, internal politics, and role uncertainty (Luthans, 2008, p. 249). Individual resources may be exhausted by denying problems and by continuously having to battle organisational stress (Pienaar, Rothmann & Van De Vijver, 2007, p. 14).

Denying problems or mental avoidance is a form of maladaptive coping (Skinner et al., 2013, p. 814), and such avoidance coping has the most significant impact on employee well-being (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 87). Ignorance of the effects of coping may be costly to the organisation in terms of stress related absenteeism and turnover, and impaired service to society (Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Cooper, 2010).

Initial positive psychological constructs, in particular coping, were mostly examined during the nineties (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007, p. 485). People in the same stressful circumstances respond differently, an issue not often considered for research by coping theorists (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1). This is because different working environments facilitate different health experiences (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 250).

Thus, human context is considered crucial to understanding coping and adaptation (Moos, 2002, p. 67). Human context entails factors in people's lives that influence their coping skills, such as the environment, social climate, different cultures, hardships, life conditions, and personal characteristics (Moos, 2002, p. 67). With this in mind, the next section explores coping as it pertains to the traffic officers in their working environment.

### *2.3.2.3 The construct of coping specific to traffic officers in their place of work*

The present state of literature yielded very little research on the concept of the coping of traffic officers (Pancheri et al., 2002; Pienaar, 2007; Van Heerden, 1990).

Van Heerden (1990) examined the effect of a stress handling programme on the job performance of traffic officials, and found that their subjective experiences of stress were influenced positively. Pienaar (2007, p. 93) found that an increasing number of traffic officers speak to the need for further training at departmental level to help them cope with stresses they face.

Pancheri et al. (2002) studied subjective stress in municipal police, and found that the subjective stress among traffic police was significantly higher than that of clerical police officers. They proposed that the stress responses of municipal police officers who operate outside are more maladaptive than the stress responses of clerical officers working inside.

Further, Mushwana (1998, p. 134) found that traffic and transportation departments are viewed as high risk departments, because workers can be injured unexpectedly. In addition, the high stress, eminent threats, and odd working hours in the traffic environment are working conditions that demand tremendous sacrifices from them in order to stay in this profession (Mushwana, 1998, p. 3).

Traffic officers spend more or less 60% of their workday doing law enforcement, and careers responsible for law enforcement have the closest contact with complex societal problems (Pienaar, 2007, p. 60). It has been established that societal problems are reflected by external stressors (Luthans, 2011, p. 282). Traffic officers must also deal with the public's negative attitudes toward them and their disregard for road safety (Pienaar, 2007, p. 63).

Much of the traffic officer's duties are based on pressured instructions (Mushwana, 1998, p. 3). Traffic officers typically work shifts, as well as long unpredictable hours (Mushwana, 1998, p. 107) when accidents and unforeseen incidents may take them outside their normal shift hours. As a result, coping relates to the place of work in that stresses in traffic officers ultimately manifest as aggression, frustration, and negatively impact their relationships with colleagues and the public (Pienaar, 2007, p. 93).

In the previous section the importance of human context in coping was described, but research seems to prefer police officers as the chosen category of law enforcers in studies relating to stress (Chopko, 2007; Louw & Viviers, 2010; Marais, 2002; Steyn et al., 2013). Nonetheless, it was established that such studies may bear relevance to the current research, given the dual nature of police work and traffic officer duties. With this in mind, consideration is given to some of the studies conducted on police officers, and what was found.

Police officers' ability to cope with stress is influenced by factors including past traumatic experiences, how well they have developed coping mechanisms, support structures, and being aware of how ignoring signs of post-traumatic reactions lead to negative results (Chopko, 2007, p. 6). Social support, personality aspects, and other resilience considerations result in a buffering effect, so that some officers experience burnout and others not (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p.1).

There is an inherent stress associated with police work, which also surpasses stress associated with most other occupations (Steyn et al., 2013, p. 20). Nevertheless, the duties of traffic officers are rapidly growing in importance, and there is a need for emotional stability, self-awareness, and stress management skills (Pienaar, 2007, p. 38).

#### *2.3.2.4 Specific view on coping adopted for the purpose of this research*

For the purpose of this study the researcher views coping as the efforts employed by individuals to reduce the negative influences of stress on personal well-being, which may involve individual resources as well as the perceptions they have of challenges (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 73; Edwards, 1988, p. 243).

The above view on coping informs the specific aim pertaining to the literature review, which seeks to conceptualise coping so as to enhance our understanding of this construct within the place of work. In line with the final literature aim, the next section explores the role of spirituality in coping in the place of work.

### **2.3.3 The role of spirituality in coping in the place of work**

Having considered the constructs individually, the theoretical link between spirituality and coping in the place of work is now discussed.

#### *2.3.3.1 Spirituality and coping in general*

There is a notion in current literature that individuals can dictate their own well-being (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 8) by practising forgiveness, spirituality and religion (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 275). Research on spirituality and coping may apply both concepts of spirituality and religion interchangeably (Rowe & Allen, 2003), as does the current study. The increased awareness associated with spirituality may help a person to become more attentive to the negative consequences of post-traumatic events, which leads to growth in terms of resilience and introspection (Chopko, 2007, p. 89).

Thus, spirituality is considered an important defence in stressful situations (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Krok, 2008, p. 1; Krok, 2008, p. 643). It is believed that people do have the power to overcome barriers to happiness in their environments through mindful actions (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 1), such as developing coping strategies to alleviate stress (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 251).

#### *2.3.3.2 Specific view on spirituality and coping adopted for the purpose of this research*

This study adopts the view that spirituality manifests differently in people's lives due to unique factors in their holistic existence (Kourie, 2009, p. 151), and therefore no one truth exists (Jacobs, 2013, p. 160). The view is also adopted that religion and spirituality can complement each other (Kourie, 2009, p. 153). Spirituality may influence coping (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383), and coping is viewed as the efforts people apply to reduce the negative influences of stress on personal well-being (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 73). Coping may involve individual resources as well as the perceptions people have of challenges (Edwards, 1988, p. 243).

### *2.3.3.3 Linking the role of spirituality in coping to the place of work in general*

Smith and Charles (2010, p. 321) studied how the spiritual dimension may be helpful in developing coping strategies. Entrenched in police challenges is a spiritual component rooted in not being valued in the community, the fight for good, and risks of losing their lives (Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 320). This means that the operational policing environment presents workers with demands already described, which negatively affect their well-being and world view (Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 320).

Theoretically, literature reflects that spirituality may influence coping (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Krok, 2008, p. 643) so that individuals may respond differently given the same challenges (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1). There is a positive correlation between spirituality and a person's coping ability, in that persons measuring high in spirituality appear to exhibit a stronger coping style using positive thoughts (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

The consequences of negative work experiences, including their manifestation as suicidal thoughts, can be countered by facing up to the stresses and uncovering what these experiences aim to teach within a religious context (Pienaar et al., 2007, p. 14). Deeper exploration is possible, and persons are deemed as capable of reflecting on their experiences (McLeod, 2003, p. 142).

The holistic nature of Humanistic Psychology is needed to address such issues as health and spirituality (Aanstoos, 2003, p. 121). Spirituality embraces the complexity and totality of a person, and provides a new way of considering lived experiences as well as the academic branch or learning (Kourie, 2009, p. 158). Persons aspire to implement the self-concept across their lives, while searching for self-actualisation and their personal meaning of existence (McLeod, 2003, p. 142). When people manage to find meaning and draw strength from adopting a spiritual perspective in work, this enables them to cope in the workplace (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58).

#### *2.3.3.4 Linking the role of spirituality in coping to the traffic officer's work environment specifically*

Traffic officers face similar challenges to police officers in that the risks of being attacked by angry motorists, being thrown off motor cycles, and being targeted for their fire arms are the same (Mushwana, 1998, p. 108). It can therefore be deduced that the spiritual component may be equally significant to the current study on the coping of traffic officers.

As mentioned before, Van Heerden (1990) yielded research on the concept of the coping of traffic officers. He found that their subjective experiences of stress were influenced positively by a stress handling programme, while Pienaar (2007, p. 93) found that more and more traffic officers desire training to help them cope with stresses.

Given that spirituality may influence coping and 'spirit at work' appears to start with the individual, such training may ideally consider the individual's whole existence (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Kourie, 2009, p. 151; Krok, 2008, p. 643). The road environment places growing demands on the traffic officer (Pienaar, 2007, p. 3), and these affect their ability to cope with stress (Pienaar, 2007, p. 93).

It has been established that the work of traffic officers is rapidly growing in importance, which creates the need for self-awareness and coping abilities in their workplace (Pienaar, 2007). Thus, spirituality and coping relate to the traffic work environment in that there is a need to pay more attention to the human element of the traffic profession (Pienaar, 2007, p. 5) due to factors described above. This chapter aims to do just that, by examining the theoretical link between spirituality and coping in the place of work.

## **2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter on the literature review presented spirituality and coping from the humanistic paradigm and the postmodern paradigm. Many supporters of humanistic treatment include in their way of thinking the outlook of postmodernism as well as people's spiritual living (Lines, 2002, p. 102). The two paradigms both draw on positive thinking in some form or another.

The general aim of this research is to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The discoveries made pertaining to the specific literature aims will now be discussed.

### **2.4.1 The conceptualisation of spirituality**

For the purpose of this study spirituality is defined as individuals' experiences of the Divine on their journey of meaningful authentic self-discovery, and entails how they express these experiences through actions and attitudes. It was found that expressions of spirituality reflect the postmodern assumption that no one truth exists, and that it is impossible to explore spirituality without looking at a person's existence holistically. Further, religion and spirituality can coincide, and do not automatically have to oppose each other.

### **2.4.2 The conceptualisation of coping**

In this study the researcher views coping as the efforts employed by individuals to reduce the negative influences of stress on personal well-being, which may involve individual resources as well as the perceptions they have of challenges. In line with this is the general view that coping encompasses a person's views of life, mental abilities and chosen behaviours which aid in facing diversities. Due to the influence of human context on coping, individuals may employ different efforts to combat stress when presented with similar life stressors.

### **2.4.3 The theoretical link between spirituality and coping in the place of work**

Individuals may respond differently in the face of similar challenges, and literature reflects that the spiritual dimension may be helpful in developing coping strategies. The work of traffic officers, as with police officials, should contain a spiritual component due to inherent work demands which negatively affect their well-being and perceptions of the world.

A positive correlation exists between spirituality and coping ability, as persons measuring high in spirituality appear to show a stronger coping style by using positive thoughts. Facing stresses and finding the meaning of experiences within a religious context through reflection, can help people counter the consequences of negative work experiences. When people manage to find meaning and draw strength from adopting a spiritual perspective at work, this enables them to cope in the workplace.

### **2.4.4 What will follow?**

Chapter Three follows with a research article on exploring the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The empirical study specifically aims to create a better understanding of how traffic officers experience the role of spirituality in coping within the South African context, and to provide a framework that can assist with understanding the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The study also aims to formulate recommendations for possible future research on exploring the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers within the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, and specifically employee and organisational wellness, and career counselling.



## CHAPTER THREE

### ARTICLE

#### EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN COPING OF TRAFFIC OFFICERS

ROCHELLE D. JACOBS

*Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology*

*UNISA*

SUPERVISOR: Mrs A. Van Niekerk

### ABSTRACT

**Orientation:** The stressful work environment of traffic officers either does not provide adequate mechanisms for coping, or members do not necessarily utilise such employee assistance opportunities. Nevertheless, traffic officers in the same stressful circumstances cope differently. One reason why traffic officers respond differently may be hidden in the concept of spirituality, since spirituality is regarded as an essential defence in stressful situations.

**Research purpose:** This study aimed to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers within the South African Traffic Services.

**Motivation for study:** From an organisational perspective this study is necessary to harness the benefits to both the traffic officer and to the employer, of understanding this phenomenon in the workplace. The spiritual well-being of traffic officers may affect their performance positively, which may translate into enhanced service delivery.

**Research design, approach and method:** A qualitative study was conducted on a purposive sample of ten traffic officers employed in the traffic services law enforcement sector. In-depth interviews were used to gather information from the participants. To achieve the aim of the study the interpretive paradigm informed the

methodology, and data was analysed using content analysis. General themes were identified as they transpired from the interviews.

**Main findings/results:** The research findings showed that traffic officers in the sample all utilised spirituality in the workplace to various extents, and that they exhibited adaptive coping abilities when doing so. They associated less spirituality or a lack of spirituality with weaker coping abilities. It was found that spirituality in traffic officers is informed by their foundation of spirituality or religion, their purpose to work and life, their connection to their spiritual source, and the fruits of spirituality. Their coping ability was influenced by their upbringing and background, by stressors in their work environment, and by their coping mechanisms. The role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers culminated in their ability to interpret the meaning of spirituality, and then to implement spirituality in order to cope.

**Practical implications:** Traffic managers and human resource practitioners may do well to contribute to the well-being of traffic officers, if they can gain insight into this phenomenon through applying the developed framework. Career Counsellors as well as Industrial and Organisational Psychologists may use this knowledge to better understand issues of adjustment and wellness of traffic officers in the traffic law enforcement environment.

**Contribution/value-add:** The findings contributed new knowledge pertaining to traffic officers and how they use spirituality to cope with the challenges in their work environment. This study therefore reflects how traffic officers use spiritual practices, values, attitudes and choices to pursue meaningful careers. Not only does this knowledge inform career counselling practices to address career-related issues in organisations, but also considers non-work influencing factors that lead to career conflict.

**Key words:** spirituality, coping, traffic officer, traffic work environment, interpretive paradigm, employee and organisational wellness, career counselling, qualitative study

## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

### **3.1.1 Key focus of the study**

The demands presented by the unique working conditions inherent to the traffic environment make it challenging to persevere in this occupation (Mushwana, 1998, p. 3). Employee well-being may be influenced by various significant factors, and employers in the South African labour force must take cognisance of these factors (Van Daalen & Odendaal, 2008, p. 425). People may respond differently when confronted with identical demands (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1), and the concept of spirituality may unveil why.

Research has indicated that individuals who are more spiritual demonstrate healthier coping abilities (Rowe & Allen, 2003). An understanding of a person's coping abilities requires insight into human context (Moos, 2002, p. 67), and the traffic environment indeed presents its own perspective. Context is also significant in spirituality, as it will manifest differently given a person's community and culture (Jacobs, 2013, p. 164).

### **3.1.2 Background to the study**

In her more than eight years in the traffic law enforcement profession, the researcher has found that the stressful work environment of traffic officers either does not provide adequate mechanisms for coping, or members do not necessarily utilise such employee assistance opportunities. In the diverse South African workforce, organisations must take note of important aspects which could affect the well-being of employees (Van Daalen & Odendaal, 2008, p. 425), as well as the fact that the work environment has become more prominent (Luthans, 2011, p. 144).

The current status in the traffic environment, from the researcher's personal experience, is that some traffic officers respond differently to others under the same challenging situations and work conditions. They may or may not allow their external environments to dictate their sense of well-being. This is due to the fact that traffic departments are typically associated with high risks (Mushwana, 1998, p. 134).

The context within which the traffic officer functions stems firstly from their appointment in terms of the National Road Traffic Act (1996). Accordingly, their duties include inspecting any vehicle for compliance with the provisions of this Act, temporarily forbidding a person from driving a vehicle should that person seem incapable, controlling and regulating traffic on any public road, and requiring any person to furnish any particulars needed for identification.

Secondly, traffic officers are appointed as peace officers in terms of section 334(1) (a) of the Criminal Procedure Act (1977), as published on 2 September 2011 (Gazette No. 34583, Regulation 707). These duties include all powers bestowed upon peace officers and all powers awarded to police officials, but exclude specified sections and/or are subject to certain provisions.

The work environment of the traffic officer includes the Law Enforcement Section within Traffic Services, where the officer carries out administrative duties. Actual law enforcement is done on all the public roads (National Road Traffic Act, 1996) within the boundaries of a particular local municipal area or provincial area as the case may be. Studies on policing and stress indicated that police work is indeed stressful (Anderson, Litzenberger & Plecas, 2002, p. 399).

Police tasks contains a spiritual element because in their job they pursue what is good, they face threats to their lives, and find their worth being ignored by the community (Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 320). Similarly, the road environment places growing demands on traffic officers (Pienaar, 2007, p. 3), because they may be attacked by disgruntled motorists, targeted for their fire arms and thrown off motor cycles (Mushwana, 1998, p. 108). This may be detrimental to their well-being and affect the individual's perspective on life (Pienaar, 2007, p. 93; Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 320).

The work of traffic officers is also becoming more important, thus the need for emotional stability, self-awareness, and stress management skills in their field (Pienaar, 2007). From an organisational perspective the study is necessary to harness the benefits, to both the traffic officer and the employer, of understanding

this phenomenon in the workplace. The spiritual well-being of traffic officers may affect their ability to cope positively, which may translate into enhanced service delivery and performance.

### **3.1.3 Research purpose**

This study aimed to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers within the South African Traffic Services. The specific aims pertaining to the literature review were to conceptualise spirituality, to conceptualise coping, and to explore the theoretical link between coping and spirituality in the place of work.

The specific aims pertaining to the empirical study were to gain a better understanding of how traffic officers experience the role of spirituality in coping within the South African context, and to provide a framework that can assist in creating an understanding of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The empirical study also specifically aimed to formulate recommendations for possible future research within the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, specifically employee and organisational wellness, and career counselling.

### **3.1.4 Trends from the research literature**

The following section explores trends from research literature on the constructs of spirituality and coping, and also considers the theoretical link between the two concepts.

#### *3.1.4.1 Spirituality*

The concept of spirituality in the workplace has come to be a popular subject in society (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009, p. 230). Spiritual well-being is found within the field of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5), and individuals who measure high in spirituality seem to apply positive thinking when dealing with their world (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

The word 'spirituality' is taken from the Latin 'spiritualitas', which is associated with 'spiritus' and 'spiritualis' (Kourie, 2009, p. 155). Spirituality can be defined as the individual's search for a holistic, persisting, meaningful, and genuine understanding of the existential self, and how to connect with the sacred (Karakas, 2010, p. 8).

Spirituality entails believing in a higher power, and understanding life through lived experience (Jacobs, 2013, p. 160; Welzen, 2011, p. 38). The spiritual experience is a personal one in which people are influenced by God, involving how they live and experience the Divine and how they give expression to these experiences (Lombaard, 2011, p. 77; Waaijman, 2006, p. 5). Adopting spirituality at a personal level also prompts people to consider ethical aspects which lead to changes in the individual, and ultimately to transformation in society (Kourie, 2009, p. 168; Naidoo, 2014, p. 1).

It appears that defining the complex concept of spirituality is very difficult (Jacobs, 2013, p. 1; Naidoo, 2014, p. 4). This is due to the subjective nature of spirituality (Karakas, 2010, p. 8), and because people's perceptions of spirituality differ according to communities and culture (Jacobs, 2013, p. 164). Amongst the various definitions, some or all of the following elements seem to be included: meaning and purpose, ethical values and beliefs, relationships or connectedness, and transcendence (Jacobs, 2013, p. 159). The post-modern approach recognises all these different views and truths on spirituality (Jacobs, 2013, p. 164), and emphasises the inter-connectedness of living things (Kourie, 2009, p. 152).

In line with all the different perspectives above, it is useful to distinguish between spirituality and religion, due to their overlapping nature (Collet, 2011, p. 59). According to literature there are different types of spiritualities (Jacobs, 2013, p. 143; Welzen, 2011, p. 37), originating from the different religious frameworks underlying them (Jacobs, 2013, p. 144). Religious frameworks may include Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and traditional African religions (Jacobs, 2013, p. 145). The classification of spirituality may include the belief in a religiously grounded belief in God with associated customs (Jacobs, 2013, p. 160). Thus, many people view spirituality and religion as the same (Christian, 2003, p. 97).

However, spirituality is more inclusive than religion, and does not depend on denomination or the convictions and practices of a specific religious body (Karakas, 2010, p. 8). People who do not view spirituality and religion as the same do not prefer traditional religion, due to the autocratic systems associated with religion (Kourie, 2009, p. 152). Other reasons why people may divert away from religion include commitment to a specific ideology, not encouraging critical thoughts, regarding scriptures as laws, and the unequal treatment of women (Kourie, 2009, p. 153).

A middle route exists in literature, in that spirituality and religion need not oppose each other (Kourie, 2009, p. 153; Rowe & Allen, 2003). Studies on spirituality and coping may apply both concepts of spirituality and religion interchangeably (Rowe & Allen, 2003). This study views spirituality as individuals' experiences of the Divine on their journey of meaningful authentic self-discovery, which involves how they express these experiences through actions and attitudes (Lombaard, 2011, p. 77; Karakas, 2010, p. 8).

Having reflected on spirituality in general, consideration is now given to how spirituality and its meaning are relevant to the place of work. Spirituality relates to the place of work as 'spirit at work' seems to begin inside the individual (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 29). In other words, spirituality entails looking within yourself, and becoming aware of your higher self, which seeks to be purposeful in life and work (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 11). Purposeful work denotes a sense of calling, or knowing that one is doing what you were meant to do (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 1).

'Spirit at work' therefore involves an energy which may motivate people to be of service to others or to have a purpose, regardless of challenges in their way (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 28). This energy denotes a livelihood or meaningfulness in work, which leads to people becoming more committed and more productive as well (Naidoo, 2014, p. 7).

The term 'spirit at work' is also useful to avoid the debate around religion and spirituality, as spirit is viewed in the context of a particular career or place of work

(Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 28), as opposed to a particular place of worship. Spirit at work comprises interpersonal, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual characteristics, and this definite state entails physiological stimulation and positive affect (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 26).

Therefore, spirituality in the workplace may bring about advantages such as enhanced employee well-being (Karakas, 2010, p. 6). However, Ali and Gibbs showed that the work ethic of believers relates to the Ten Commandments in Judaism, Christianity and Islam (1998, as cited in Naidoo, 2014, p. 3). Thus, within the workplace, spirituality may develop employees so that their actions are informed by personal truth, values and ethical considerations (Naidoo, 2014, p. 1). As a result, spirituality in the workplace may also bring about disadvantages such as discrimination due to spiritual beliefs (Karakas, 2010, p. 26).

Nonetheless, spirit at work comprises the trust that your work improves the world, the recognition of a connection to a higher power, and a feeling of excellence (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008, p. 319). Mohan and Uys (2006, p. 58) also considered the aspect of a connectedness in the spirituality of people at work, being the relationship with a higher force and cherished relationships with other people. This sense of connectedness with people is part of the need for self-actualisation in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which motivates some people (Theron, 2009a, p. 132). Motivation involves purpose, and Baruch views spiritual purpose as being driven by a deeper meaning, and the search for creative self-expression through work (2004, as cited in Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007, p. 60).

Mohan and Uys (2006, p. 58) showed that the spiritual perspectives of people at work include a relationship with a higher force which gives strength and enables coping. Mohan and Uys (2006, p. 58) further stated that the spiritual perspective is one in which individuals receive direction, experience a connection sustained through prayer and reflection, see meaning and purpose in events or work, and believe that the inner world creates their external realities.



Even though literature indicates that there is no clear definition of spirituality (Jacobs, 2013, p. 143), I would contest that the issue may be less about clarity as commonalities in perspectives are evident (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58). Perhaps the issue is more about whether there is a common definition understood by all, as there may be too many people defining spirituality differently. Nonetheless, the benefits of spirituality in the workplace seem to outweigh the disadvantages (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009, p. 2). It aids in conflict resolution (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58) and enhances organisational performance by improving employee well-being (Karakas, 2010, p. 20).

Existing research related to the spirituality of traffic officers is either fairly old (Mushwana, 1998; Van Heerden, 1990), or explores spirituality from a police officer's perspective (Collett, 2011; Joubert & Grobler, 2013; Karakas, 2010; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008; Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003). Since human context influences how people cope (Moos, 2002, p. 67), it is necessary to consider spirituality from the traffic officer's perspective, and therefore also coping.

#### *3.1.4.2 Coping*

Generally, coping refers to the perceptual, mental or behavioural efforts that people employ to deal with situations deemed potentially difficult and stressful (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 383). Coping is a positive psychological construct which was mostly explored during the nineties (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007, p. 485).

Approaches on coping in Psychology may include viewing it as part of the emotional process, which involves identifying and measuring ways of dealing with problem situations (Ryan, Rapley & Dziurawiec, 2014, p. 1068). Coping may also be considered from a trait-based perspective, in which coping becomes a stable behaviour once attained (Edwards, 1998, p. 241). Although both approaches view coping ability as the presence or absence of coping skills, they differ in the extent to which contextual factors such as social factors are considered, as opposed to individual factors (Ryan et al., 2014, p. 1069).

Edwards (1998, p. 241) contended that the description of coping as stable, in the trait approach above, is often not the case. The Control theory is a useful theoretical framework to help understand human behaviour, and Edwards (1992, p. 238) used it to construct an integrative cybernetics theory of stress, coping and well-being. Its foundation is self-regulation within a negative feedback loop, in which one employs efforts to reduce discrepancies between environmental factors and particular reference criteria (Cheng, Mauno & Lee, 2014, p. 74; Edwards, 1992, p. 239). A reference criterion or desired state may be a particular goal, and when a disturbance is sensed in the environment, the person will compare the sensed environment or perceived state with the reference criteria (Edwards, 1992, p. 239). The discrepancies motivate the person to take action aimed at minimising the gap between the sensed status and the desired state (Edwards, 1992, p. 240).

In the derived theory of Edwards (1992, p. 245) on coping, it is important to consider the relationship between stress, coping and well-being by noting its definitions. He views stress as a 'discrepancy between an employee's perceived state and desired state' in which the employee considers the discrepancy to be significant. Further, he suggested that stress influences two categories of outcomes. Firstly, it influences employees on a psychological and physical level, which he combines to represent employee well-being. Secondly, he suggested that stress influences coping, and defines coping as efforts employed to 'prevent or reduce the negative effects of stress on well-being'. Thus, coping influences well-being when people change their perceptions and desires about inconsistencies or about its relevance (Edwards, 1992, p. 257).

For the purpose of this study the researcher views coping as the efforts employed by individuals to reduce the negative influences of stress on personal well-being, which may involve individual resources as well as their perceptions of challenges (Cheng et al., p. 73; Edwards, 1988, p. 243). Boehmer, Luszczynska and Schwarzer (2007, p. 63) also explored the self-regulatory view on coping, and stated that coping strategies are aimed at altering the afflicted relationship between person and environment, or at regulating emotional distress. Ultimately, the choice of coping strategy will depend on the situation at hand (Boehmer et al., 2007, p. 61). Within the

various situations presented by the environment, coping will require being able to respond to the needs of people in an understanding manner, enabling one to develop social connections with others (Krishnakumar, Narine, Soonthorndhada & Thianlai, 2014, p. 21).

Since social connections are essential in any setting, Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2013, p. 803) examined adaptive or maladaptive coping among academics. Adaptive coping entails how to solve problems, finding comfort with people, encouraging oneself and commitment to the task. Maladaptive coping comprises confusion, suppressing negative occurrences, blaming others, self-pity, and mentally avoiding challenges (Skinner et al., 2013, p. 814). Avoidance coping has the most considerable influence on employee well-being (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 87).

People use coping strategies to reduce the impact of organisational stressors on well-being (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 74). Denying problems and the continuous battle against organisational stress may deplete individual resources and thus affect their well-being negatively (Pienaar, Rothmann & Van De Vijver, 2007, p. 14). Internal organisational stressors include red tape, internal politics, and role uncertainty (Luthans, 2008, p. 249). External organisational stressors include technology, changes in the economy, globalisation, the effects of family on the community, and race and gender considerations (Luthans, 2011, p. 282).

Human context is essential in our understanding of coping (Moos, 2002, p. 67), and includes environmental factors, social climate, cultural differences, hardships, life conditions, and personal characteristics (Moos, 2002, p. 67). Different organisational environments bring about different health experiences (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 250), and people presented with the same stressful situations respond differently (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1).

Research on the concept of coping in traffic officers are scarce (Pancheri et al., 2002; Pienaar, 2007; Van Heerden, 1990). Pienaar (2007, p. 93) established that more traffic officers desire further training at departmental level to help them cope with stressors. Pancheri et al. (2002) examined the subjective stress of municipal

police, and found that traffic police experienced significantly higher subjective stress than clerical police officers. Pancheri et al. (2002) suggested that the stress response of municipal police officers who work outside is more maladaptive than the stress response of clerical officers working inside. Van Heerden (1990) studied the influence of a stress handling programme on the job performance of traffic officials, and established that their subjective experiences of stress were affected in a positive manner by the stress handling programme.

In addition, more detailed research pertaining to traffic officers' working environments was fairly old. Mushwana (1998, p. 134) view traffic departments as high risk because workers are threatened by unexpected injury. Further, work conditions, such as high stress, obvious threats and odd working hours require incredible sacrifices to stay in this job (Mushwana, 1998, p. 3). Approximately 60% of the traffic officer's workday consists of law enforcement, thus having very close contact with societal problems (Pienaar, 2007, p. 60). Earlier it was found that societal problems are reflected by external stressors (Luthans, 2011, p. 282).

Thus, traffic officers are presented with negative attitudes from the public and their ignorance of road safety (Pienaar, 2007, p. 63). Their duties may originate from pressured instructions (Mushwana, 1998, p. 3) from supervisors, and traffic officers typically work shifts (Mushwana, 1998, p. 107). Stresses in traffic officers may be expressed as aggression, frustration, and may negatively affect relationships with each other and the public (Pienaar, 2007, p. 93). The lack of coping skills in employees may have negative effects for employees and organisations, such as poor service to society as well as increased absenteeism and employee turnover (Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Cooper, 2010).

#### *3.1.4.3 The role of spirituality in coping in the place of work*

Literature indicated that people can affect their own well-being (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 8) through practices of forgiveness, spirituality and religion (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 275). The current study applies both concepts of spirituality and religion interchangeably, as the two can complement each other

(Kourie, 2009, p. 153; Rowe & Allen, 2003). Spirituality enhances awareness (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 220), and by being aware of the harmful effects of post-traumatic events one develops resilience (Chopko, 2007, p. 89).

Thus, spirituality is considered an important defence in stressful situations (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Krok, 2008, p. 1). People are capable of rising above environmental obstacles to happiness through mindful actions, such as adopting coping strategies to deal with stressors (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 1; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 251). This study relies on the view that people express spirituality differently given the unique factors that make up their lives in totality, and the different truths they hold (Jacobs, 2013, p. 160; Kourie, 2009, p. 151).

The spiritual dimension may be helpful in developing coping strategies (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 321). A positive relationship exists between spirituality and coping ability, because individuals measuring high in spirituality seem to display a stronger coping style through positive thoughts (Rowe & Allen, 2003). People can manage the effects of negative work experiences by confronting the stressors and looking for lessons in such experiences from a religious perspective (Pienaar et al., 2007, p. 14). People yearn to implement the self-concept throughout their experiences (McLeod, 2003, p. 142), and when they obtain meaning and strength from using spirituality in the workplace, this facilitates coping (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58).

Given that 'spirit at work' begins with the individual and requires consideration of existence holistically (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Kourie, 2009, p. 151; Krok, 2008, p. 643), more attention needs to be given to the human element of traffic officers, and not just to the law enforcement aspects of their profession (Pienaar, 2007, p. 5). Human elements include the values that drive them (Pienaar, 2007, p. 24), and how to cope with stress presented during the performance of their daily duties (Pienaar, 2007, p. 104).

To summarise, the theoretical relationship between spirituality in coping in the place of work has been explored (Figure 3.1). Trends in literature indicate how spirituality influences coping (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Krok, 2008, p. 643) so that individuals may respond differently given the same challenges (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1). Firstly, the same stressor may be posed to different individuals. Secondly, higher and lower levels of spirituality result in the application of positive and negative thoughts respectively. Thus, positive thoughts are associated with high spirituality and appears to result in stronger coping styles, while the application of negative thoughts is associated with lower spirituality, resulting in weak coping styles (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

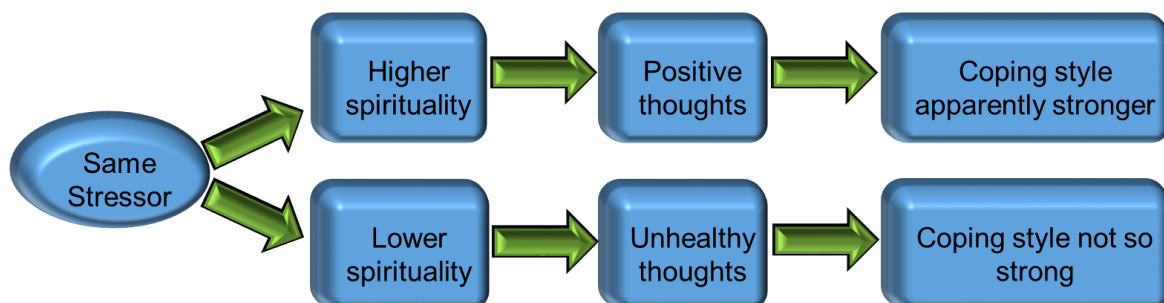


Figure 3.1: Theoretical relationship between spirituality and coping

### 3.1.5 Research problem and objectives

In the light of the above literature review, this study is important, as it aims to explore the role of spirituality in coping in a category of law enforcers not often considered for this purpose, namely traffic officers. As has been established, spirituality is regarded as an essential defence in stressful situations and therefore in coping (Krok, 2008, p. 643; Rowe & Allen, 2003). Initial positive psychological constructs, in particular coping, were mostly examined during the nineties (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007, p. 485). However, it has not been studied in relation to the role of spirituality in coping, and also not specifically to the traffic officer. Thus, existing research with traffic officers as the unit of analysis is either fairly old (Mushwana, 1998; Van Heerden, 1990) or explores spirituality in other categories of law enforcers (Collett, 2011; Karakas, 2010; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008). Similarly, when spirituality and coping are

considered in relation to law enforcers, the preferred category seems to be police officers (Joubert & Grobler, 2013; Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003). Thus, it appears that the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers has not yet been sufficiently explored.

### **3.1.6 The potential value add of the study**

Traffic officers work in stressful environments in which they may be required to call upon their own spirituality to withstand the threats and demands of their work environment. The organisation and traffic officers will benefit from understanding this phenomenon, as research has shown that individuals with higher spirituality exhibit better coping abilities (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

The findings have contributed new knowledge that can be used by professionals involved with traffic officers to facilitate their optimal psychological well-being and adjustment in the workplace. This knowledge can also inform career counselling practices to address the individual's career-related issues in organisations and non-work influencing factors that lead to career conflict. Career-related issues relate to career competencies that are required to pursue careers that are meaningful, and the ability to cope despite challenges (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 380). Non-work influencing factors typically include non-work commitments affecting our view of stress and well-being, such as family responsibilities and relationships (Blackman & Murphy, 2012, p. 8). Thus, this study can help traffic officers to use spirituality to cope with their profession's inherent stressors in order not to manifest negative behaviour, such as frustration and other behaviour that would result in damaged relationships (Pienaar, 2007, p. 93).

### **3.1.7 What will follow?**

The following section focuses on the research design. In addition to the research approach and the method used, the rest of the article sets out the findings, conclusions reached, the limitations of the study and the recommendations.

## **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.2.1 Research approach**

A qualitative approach with an interpretive perspective has been used to understand the role of spirituality in the coping of participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 273), with the overall purpose of the research being explorative in nature. In line with the qualitative tradition, the interpretive approach informed the data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128).

The interpretive approach views the human as the instrument and assumes that multiple truths are held by individuals (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135). The interpretive approach is suitable for the subjective realities being studied (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 134), and the resultant intersubjective epistemological stance adopted toward their reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 7). This approach facilitated the exploration of the realities constructed by the research participants (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130), and the deduction of meaning to answer the research questions.

### **3.2.2 Research method**

The interpretive research method is concerned about the human experience of phenomena as they are revealed in a conscious lived experience (Jacobs, 2013, p. 160; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The research method reflects how the researcher carried out the practical study of what needed to be explored (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 6), and is described in the following sections.

### **3.2.3 Research strategy**

The research strategy is interpretive, as it relies on the subjective experiences and realities constructed by the research participants (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). The unit of analysis is made up of traffic officers, from whom data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Bergh, 2009d, p. 439; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011).



### **3.2.4 Research setting**

The research was located within the traffic law enforcement environment, and focussed on the traffic officer. The work environment of traffic officers comprises a Law Enforcement Section within the particular Traffic Services where they perform administrative duties. It also comprises the public roads according to the area of jurisdiction, where actual law enforcement takes place. It has been determined that the work environment of traffic officers is very demanding (Pienaar, 2007, p. 3) given their inherent roles and responsibilities (Criminal Procedure Act, 1977; National Road Traffic Act, 1996).

#### *3.2.4.1 Entrée and establishing researcher roles*

Ethical clearance was required to conduct the research (Wassenaar, 2009, p. 61), and was provided by the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology of the University of South Africa (see Annexure D). The nature of the study did not require gaining access to a particular research setting (Kelly, 2006b, p. 312). Thus, individual written consent sufficed for the purpose of this research. Subsequently, informed consent was obtained from the traffic officers who voluntarily showed interest in contributing toward the study (see Annexure A).

Participants were given background information to the study before each interview and throughout, while the researcher fulfilled an empathetic and subjective role (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276; Wassenaar, 2009, p. 72). In addition, informative letters were sent to the prospective traffic control authorities (see Annexure C) to promote ongoing respect (Wassenaar, 2009, p. 73), transparency, and to inform them of the intended study and its purpose (see Annexure C).

#### *3.2.4.2 Sampling*

The research was conducted with participants who brought experiences from one or more Traffic Services Centres or stations. A non-probability purposive sample of ten traffic officers was used to serve the exploratory nature of this study (Durrheim & Painter, 2006, p. 139). Participants were intentionally chosen to shed light on the

central research topic (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). In addition, inclusion criteria were applicable, as law enforcement officers needed to be traffic officers, either currently employed or having been employed as such previously.

A representative sample was not required, as the aim was not to generalise the results (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, the sample size was adequate as the researcher's ability to extract in-depth information tends to decrease in qualitative studies, as each new participant is added (Creswell, 2012, p. 209).

The biographical information used to describe the sample profile consisted of race, age and gender (Table 3.1). The variables were informed by the empirical study. The sample's biographical composition consisted of one Black participant, one White participant, and eight Mixed race participants. Their gender distribution consisted of six males and four females. In terms of the composition of the age groups, there were no participants younger than 25 years, while four were between the ages of 26 and 35, three were between the ages of 36 and 45, and three were between the ages of 46 and 55 years.

**Table 3.1:**  
Biographical composition of traffic officers

Category	Number of Traffic Officers
<b>Age Groups</b>	
Younger than 25 years	0
26-35 years	4
36-45 years	3
46-55 years	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>10</i>
<b>Race Groups</b>	
Black	1
Mixed race	8
Asian	0
White	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>10</i>
<b>Gender Groups</b>	
Male	6
Female	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>10</i>

### 3.2.4.3 Data collection methods

Qualitative data was gathered using semi-structured in-depth interviews (Yin, 2010, p. 129). This data collection method was suitable for collecting the data to answer the research questions, as it elicited detailed relevant meaning from the participants so as to understand the topic in context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 322; Van de Vyver, 2010, p. 52). It also suited exploring the nature of the reality studied (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130), being people's internal reality of their external world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 7). This reality required a researcher-participant relationship (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131), characterised by empathy and observer subjectivity, to understand others through interacting and listening (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 276). Thus, the data collection method is in line with the chosen interpretive paradigm (Durrheim, 2006, p. 40).

Hence, the practical implementation of the interpretive approach encouraged sharing of in-depth information. The process followed is provided in the interview schedule (see Annexure B), and entailed preparing for the interview, preparing the applicant, obtaining consent to record the interview, asking open-ended questions, and ending the interview (Kelly, 2006b, p. 297). The following open-ended questions served to ascertain how the constructs of spirituality and coping are conceptualised by the traffic officers:

- *How do you cope in the workplace?*
- *Which mechanisms do you use to help you cope?*
- *How do you experience spirituality or religion in the workplace?*
- *How do you use spirituality as a coping mechanism in the workplace?*

Where applicable, these questions were presented in the past tense to accommodate ex-traffic officers. The questions were developed based on the research objectives and to allow for in-depth exploration of the experiences of participants. The first transcription was presented to the supervisor under a pseudonym, and reviewed to ensure that the questions elicited relevant information on spirituality and coping from participants. The necessary changes were made

which resulted in the above four final empirical questions provided. The estimated time per participant was one hour per interview.

#### *3.2.4.4 Recording of data*

Permission was obtained from participants in advance to audio tape the interviews, from which verbatim transcriptions were made (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010, p. 3; Terre Blanche et al., 298; Wassenaar, 2009, p. 75). Participants were afforded the opportunity to verify their transcriptions during follow-up interviews. As stated, the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and transcribing the data.

In addition, quality data was extracted by fulfilling a subjective role and making participants comfortable to share in-depth experiences, by listening attentively and interacting with them empathically (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Interviews were conducted where respondents felt comfortable to share their experiences in a natural manner (Kelly, 2006b, p. 317; Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276), and predominantly away from their work environment so as to avoid interruptions (Kelly, 2006b, p. 298).

#### *3.2.4.5 Analysing the data*

The sampling method described earlier is in line with the chosen data analysis method as well. Analysis within the interpretive paradigm assumes that the reality being explored is that of people's subjective experiences, and therefore inductive reasoning was used (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2010, p. 367; Yin, 2010, p. 94). The researcher was part of the research process through her subjective interaction with the respondents (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 276) and by having primary responsibility for data analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135).

Data from interviews was analysed using content analysis, this being useful to reduce textual data into themes and meaningful categories (Muchinsky et al., 2009, p. 31). More specifically, conventional content analysis was applied, suitable to describe experiences, and when existing research literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh, 2005, p. 1279).

Data obtained from the open-ended questions in the interviews was analysed primarily according to the following process (Creswell, 2012, p. 237):

- Data was prepared and organised, being the transcribed interviews;
- Data was explored and coded;
- The data was coded to build themes;
- Findings were represented and reported;
- Interpretation of findings was done;
- The accuracy of findings was validated.

This systematic process facilitated getting to know the body of material, defining characteristics, breaking items down into more manageable items for analysis, and scrutinising material for qualities identified earlier (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 144). The objective was to bring meaning, structure, and order to data (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). The general themes were identified as they transpired from the interviews (Terre Blanche et al, 2006, p. 323).

The data was deemed saturated once a satisfactory understanding was obtained, and new material confirmed accounts, rather than adding new themes or knowledge relating to spirituality and coping (Kelly, 2006a, p. 372). Data was analysed prior to conducting the extensive literature review in an attempt to be more objective during the process of content analysis. This is acceptable as qualitative research allows for flexibility in strategies and procedures, given that the design emerges as the research process unfolds (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 12).

#### *3.2.4.6 Strategies employed to ensure quality data*

Kelly (2006a, p. 378) suggested that the term 'reliability' is not inappropriate in qualitative research, and translates into the question: *'Have I reliably given voice to your experience?'* Reliability was ensured by giving participants the opportunity to evaluate and validate transcriptions themselves, and by consulting theoretical views from a range of widely accessible literature sources (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009).

Transferability denotes the extent to which research findings can provide answers in different contexts (Kelly, 2006a, p. 381), thus the possibility that findings can be transferred to other settings or groups (Elo et al., 2014, p. 2). The researcher dealt with transferability by ensuring that the data, the sampling method, and the participants were described accurately (Elo et al., 2014, p. 3), and by providing a detailed description of the research context as described previously (Anfara et al., 2002).

Dependability was ensured through creating an audit trail and triangulation (Anfara et al., 2002). Triangulation entailed checking that the findings about the participants' perceptions were in line with the findings about their feelings, and by conversing with individual traffic officers on two or more occasions (Kelly, 2006a, p. 380). This ensured correct representation of the individual's views (Yin, 2010).

#### *3.2.4.7 Methods to ensure ethical research principles*

In the initial stages of each interview participants were informed of the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2012, p. 221). They were informed that participation was voluntary and what this participation entailed (Wassenaar, 2009, p. 67). Further, they were informed of the expected duration of each interview, and that withdrawal could take place at any stage without reason or consequence (Kelly, 2006b, p. 298; Wassenaar, 2009, p. 72). It was also explained how data will be used, that no potential risks were anticipated for this study, and how feedback will be provided to them (Wassenaar, 2009, p. 67; Yin, 2010, p. 25).

In addition to the measures described in the previous section, reliability was ensured by having participants validate their contributions (Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009) in follow-up sessions. Transferability was ensured through the careful selection of participants using purposive sampling, and by providing a detailed description of the research context to enable readers to decide on the transfer of findings to other settings (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 30). As mentioned, dependability was ensured through creating an audit trail (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 30), and comprised of keeping

record of how data was managed (Kelly, 2006a, p. 376; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 334; Yin, 2010, p. 29).

Ethical consideration was given in that the natural research setting was not disturbed (Creswell, 2012, p. 23), and ensured by conducting interviews predominantly outside the workplace. This contributed to participant anonymity, privacy and confidentiality (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 101). Further, participants were referred to as 'Candidate A' or 'Candidate B' in the transcriptions and completed data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 146).

There was researcher bias because the researcher was previously employed in the traffic work environment and has traffic officer experience. However, strong and exclusive bonds are formed in the traffic fraternity, and this familiarity enabled participants to share their experiences more freely. Some of the bias was eliminated by having respondents view their transcriptions for accuracy, and to show how themes emerged out of their narrative evidence provided (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006, p. 93; Yin, 2010, p. 274). The researcher also contained her own bias during the preparation for the interviews by reminding herself and the participants of the exploratory nature of the study, and that the purpose of the study was to unearth their unique experiences and not the researcher's.

Further, the researcher remained conscious of reflecting on the contributions of the traffic officers and not her past experiences. She employed awareness so as to try and keep her past related experiences out of the interview, and by being present in the moment for the participant's personal experiences. The researcher managed the researcher-participant relationship by means of the pre-established non-leading interview questions, and at times literally reminded participants, where needed, to converse as if she knew nothing about the field. This helped her to enter interviews with no preconceived notions, so that the design could evolve as she learned about the research question from the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Finally, information provided was held securely until the research was completed and published, after which it was to be destroyed. The researcher stored the information personally and was the only person with access to it.

#### *3.2.4.8 Reporting on the data*

Data was reported on to reflect the empirical aims of the study, namely to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers; to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, and to provide a framework that can assist in creating an understanding of the relationship between the two constructs. Finally, the empirical aims entailed the formulation of recommendations for possible future research. The research findings were reported on by using a qualitative writing style. An inductive approach was used to work through the raw data obtained from the interviews and to merge the research question with the findings from the data (Durrheim, 2006, p. 40). This allowed for a reliable reflection of the participants' subjective experiences.

The findings to follow describe the themes, sub-themes and related aspects that emerged (Creswell, 2012, p. 343) from the traffic officers' experiences. The discussion on the findings will integrate existing literature (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 142), and verbatim quotes are used to substantiate the findings. Thus, findings were reported on in a responsible and transparent manner (Yin, 2010, p. 19).

### **3.3 FINDINGS**

The following section contains the results of the qualitative research as they pertain to the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers.

#### **3.3.1 Spirituality**

Participants shared their experiences on spirituality by answering the following open-ended question:

*How do you experience spirituality or religion in the workplace?*



The data analysis yielded four main themes (Table 3.2) related to the participants' experiences of spirituality or religion in the place of work: (1) foundation of spirituality or religion, (2) purpose to work and life, (3) connection to a spiritual source, and (4) fruits of spirituality. These themes, together with their sub-themes, are discussed next.

**Table 3.2:**

Spirituality themes and sub-themes

Construct	Themes	Sub-themes
Spirituality	Foundation of spirituality or religion	Influence of a higher power
		Upbringing within spirituality or religion
		Values and morals
	Purpose to work and life	Spirituality or religion dictates my life
		Gives purpose and meaning to life
		View career as a calling
		Decision-making
	Connection to a spiritual source	Involvement in church
		Prayer
		Spiritual resources
	Fruits of spirituality	Calmness
		Positive attitudes
		Forgiveness
Inner strength		
Awareness		

### 3.3.1.1 Theme: *Foundation of spirituality or religion*

A foundation of spirituality or religion emerged as a prominent theme, as it plays a fundamental role in the development and formation of the traffic officer's spirituality. The main features of this theme involved the following: (a) influence of a higher power, (b) upbringing within spirituality or religion, and (c) values and morals. Most participants used religion and spirituality interchangeably (Rowe & Allen, 2003). Religion or spirituality was thought to influence the participant's actions, beliefs, and their entire way of living (Kourie, 2009, p. 158). These aspects related to the foundation of spirituality or religion which emerged in the following experiences:

(a) *Sub-theme: Influence of a higher power*

Participants indicated that the influence of a higher power was an integral part of their spirituality (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008, p. 319). They viewed this higher power as something or someone bigger and more powerful than all else, that is in control and worthy of recognition in times of challenge. In the high risk traffic environment (Mushwana, 1998, p. 134) a traffic officer relies on this higher power for the protection of self and others. Their external working environment comprises different road users including motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists who are all at risk due to accidents and dangerous incidents. They believe that their higher power is omnipresent, and thus able to keep all safe in their working environment and in their personal lives. The supporting experiences to this sub-theme include:

*'Biggest source, anchor and Jesus Christ in the workplace.'* (Candidate D)

*'You praise the Most High.'* (Candidate F)

*'I always pray for the cars in front, next to and behind me. So it happens a lot that the cars, instead of driving into us...swerve away.'* (Candidate A)

*'For me I would say, the source of my spirituality is like the higher force. Some might call it Jesus, some might call it Allah. The Hindu's they know what they call it...in my book I would call it the Holy Trinity.'* (Candidate B)

*'And really, there have been more than one incident...then after that you feel that there is indeed a Father looking down.'* (Candidate G)

(b) *Sub-theme: Upbringing within spirituality or religion*

Participants believed that their upbringing played a fundamental role in the formation of their views on spirituality, as this was where education or coaching took place whether from church, parents, or others. It appears that there are life lessons learnt in childhood which may inform the spiritual view adopted later in life, even if they did

not understand its worth when they were younger. Therefore, contextual factors causes spirituality to manifest differently given a person's community and culture (Jacobs, 2013, p. 164), and this was reflected in experiences as follows:

*'I would have to go back to my upbringing, and what was instilled with the religious background and influence. And that will influence my decision.'* (Candidate B)

*'My mom had a very important role in my Christian life. You need to have received a good foundation of education in your upbringing.'* (Candidate F).

*'I was the only kid who was not allowed to miss church.'* (Candidate E)

*'You know now how our mothers are about the Rosary. Oh goodness, I prayed the Rosary. So it has definitely been a part of my routine...it is not just now...'* (Candidate G)

(c) *Sub-theme: Values and morals*

Participants indicated that spirituality or religion is made up of values and morals (Jacobs, 2013, p. 159), which help them to distinguish between right and wrong and so guide their way of living. They reported finding themselves exploring ethical aspects (Kourie, 2009, p. 168), as reflected by the following experiences:

*'You need to have a good understanding of the do's and the don'ts.'* (Candidate F)

*'I would say, I would directly go to the Ten Commandments: thou shall not steal, thou shall not kill...'* (Candidate B)

*'And I ask...it seems I have done something wrong. I said Lord what have I done wrong? I want to know, then I apologise.'* (Candidate H)

*'They see the fruits in you as a person...you must be an honest man. You must be a person with absolute integrity.'* (Candidate D)

### 3.3.1.2 Theme: Purpose to work and life

The purpose to work and life also emerged as a prominent theme. Spirituality enables a person to see events and work as meaningful and valuable to self and others (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58). The main features of this theme comprised the following: (a) spirituality or religion dictates my life, (b) gives purpose and meaning to life, (c) view career as a calling, and (d) decision-making.

#### (a) Sub-theme: Spirituality or religion dictates my life

Participants opined that spirituality informed the construction of their reality (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). In this reality their spirituality or religion becomes a source of direction or focus which dictates their actions. This spiritual reality reflects the truth that individuals strive towards (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135). Thus, spirituality gives meaning to what they do (Karakas, 2010, p. 20), as reflected in the following statements:

*'And it is my guidance in my life...because the scripture says so beautifully: Jesus is the way, he is the truth, and he is life. So for me if I did not have Jesus in my life, there is no direction, there is no truth.'* (Candidate A)

*'Because that's the only truth, the real truth.'* (Candidate D)

*'I would say, it entails my whole existence, my whole belief, everything that I do is based on my religion or my spirituality...that's sort of my compass in life...that sort of steers me and guides me.'* (Candidate B)

*'It is a rule of fact that Christianity must play a role in every individual in this work environment.'* (Candidate F)

*'And then, in times when it's not going well...your faith, perseverance...you can make it...and this is how I focussed. I do not let people distract me, for me to fail.'* (Candidate J)

(b) *Sub-theme: Gives purpose and meaning to life*

Participants described that the direction and guidance obtained from spirituality add meaning to work and life (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58). Thus, spirituality gives a feeling that work has purpose (Karakas, 2010, p. 2), which entails a desire to be of service, being able to stay the course, and to do what one has set out to do even in difficult times. This is illustrated through the following statements:

*'I want to get out of my circumstances, and I would like to give back to my community...in my street. I just feel, if I didn't have Him in my life, I would not have achieved what I achieved.'* (Candidate A)

*'I know why I am at work, I am there to do a job. I am there to serve the community. And the scripture that stands out for me in the Bible is Proverbs which states that one should not be lazy. So I plan my day...sometimes it is difficult because the day is unpredictable....but I try very hard to remain focussed.'* (Candidate I)

*'When I saw how the people drove on the roads – irresponsible, and I encountered many accidents where people died and so, then I told myself: one day you can make a difference. And I turned to the profession.'* (Candidate J)

(c) *Sub-theme: View career as a calling*

Spirituality allows individuals to view their career as a calling (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012, p. 220). A calling entails meaning (Karakas, 2010, p. 2), thus knowing that you are doing what you were meant to do, or what you were called to do from a spiritual perspective. Thus, they seem to have a passion for their work (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 1), as reflected in the following experiences:

*'It's my job, it's my passion...that's what I know. Since I can remember I wanted to be a cop or traffic officer.'* (Candidate C)

*'Look, I wanted to become a traffic officer all these years...well, then it also happened like that, for which I am very grateful. I was really alive in my work to tell you the truth, from day one, I had a passion for it.'* (Candidate E)

*'Not any guy becomes a successful traffic officer in the profession. I say it's a calling.'* (Candidate F)

(d) *Sub-theme: Decision-making*

It seems that the direction a person's life takes is very much a matter of conscious decision-making. The participants opined that they have the power to choose what they want to happen in their life and career through mindful actions (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 1).

Mindful actions were expressed as making decisions informed by guidance through prayer, and religious or spiritual beliefs. Mindful actions also involved taking control and responsibility for what manifests in their lives, thus acknowledging their free will (Bergh, 2009b, p. 317). This sub-theme is reflected by the following experiences:

*'I will also pray during the day. Especially when I am faced with a decision over what I must now do.'* (Candidate I)

*'And it depends on you as a person what you will make of the career.'* (Candidate F)

*'And it also depends on how you see it. Will you now...make an elephant from a fly, or will you see it as just another thing, or are you going to become agitated?'* (Candidate E)

*'So it's up to you how you will use it. Will you see people who are cursing you or will you now see it as a challenge?'* (Candidate G)

*'I was in a position where I could kill, and I chose not to do that. I would say that's based on my religious beliefs.'* (Candidate B)

### 3.3.1.3 Theme: Connection to a spiritual source

Connection to a spiritual source emerged as another prominent theme. It involves the strategies that traffic officers apply in order to tap into, or connect to their higher power or spiritual source. The main features of this theme comprised: (a) involvement in church, (b) prayer, and (c) spiritual resources. These aspects emerged in the following experiences:

#### (a) Sub-theme: Involvement in church

Participants appear to have a connection with a higher force (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58) which they nurture in various ways, one of which is involvement in the church. One traffic officer opined that it was not necessary to go to church to experience this bond with their higher power, thus spirituality was not dependent on a denomination in this particular instance (Karakas, 2010, p. 8).

Traffic officers who value involvement in church or going to church use it as a mechanism to help them to cope, by drawing from the support and spiritual lessons learnt from the social connections. All of their related experiences are illustrated below:

*'I am involved in a church, and in my church there are many different activities throughout the week. And then Sunday is my usual service.'* (Candidate I)

*'As in the past, as I have already said I was involved in the church. I am very involved and use it as my tool.'* (Candidate G)

*'But I cannot say that I'm 100% Christian because I don't go to church. Because to me, the Bible says...He did not create a physical building.'* (Candidate C)

*'If I remember well, I had to rely heavily on the Lord, and I have been very independent from childhood. And I don't know who guided me to attend church when I was younger, but I went to church a lot.'* (Candidate H)

*'There in my parish, at my church....we are very close...we pray for each other there.'*  
(Candidate J)

(b) *Sub-theme: Prayer*

Participants use prayer to establish a connection to their spiritual source (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008, p. 319). They talk to God and ask for help, strength and courage in various situations (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58), and this helps them to cope, as reflected by the following statements:

*'I could always go to my Creator, and then...I talk to my God for these challenges to overcome.'* (Candidate D)

*'I said Lord...I told Him He should give me the strength and the courage...'*  
(Candidate H)

*'I always ask for strength from above. And it's one of the things that makes me strong and carries me through.'* (Candidate J)

*'I promise you, it helps to become silent and ask for strength.'* (Candidate G)

(c) *Sub-theme: Spiritual resources*

In order to sustain the connection with their higher power (Karakas, 2010, p. 8) the traffic officers use various spiritual resources, including listening to spiritual music, conversing with family and friends, or reading spiritual material. The spiritual resources facilitate better coping by making them mentally and emotionally receptive to spiritual lessons. Their related experiences are reflected in the following statements:

*'I have a thing in the morning as I drive to work, then I put in a gospel song. It gives me courage...it gives me new strength, where I might not have felt so good in the morning, or not have felt like coming to work.'* (Candidate A)



*'Even like the scriptures that my cousin sends me. Look, she sends me messages every morning. And it is as if He is also working through her.'* (Candidate C)

*'I have such a book...Bible Verses for Men. If I get a chance I will read a verse and then look whether it is applicable to my life or my career at any level.'* (Candidate F)

*'Last night we gathered to pray...later I had to remind everybody that we had to go home, that's how nice it was to gather around the Word...and it is going well.'* (Candidate J)

#### 3.3.1.4 Theme: Fruits of spirituality

Fruits of spirituality emerged in that participants are of the opinion that spirituality manifests in their expressions (Lombaard, 2011, p. 77) of values, characteristics and behaviour, in both their work and private lives. They were also able to compare these characteristics at various stages in their own lives, against themselves as well as other colleagues. Individuals may be recognised by their actions or by the fruits of spirituality, which emerged primarily as the following: (a) calmness, (b) positive attitudes, (c) forgiveness, (d) strength, and (e) awareness:

##### (a) Sub-theme: Calmness

Participants attached great importance to their ability to become calm when faced with challenges, or being able to exert self-control. Traffic officers must deal with the public's negative attitudes toward them (Pienaar, 2007, p. 63), as well as personal attacks. Thus, calmness or self-control is important to deal responsibly with their own emotions and those of others, as reflected by the following experiences:

*'One should remain calm. In any profession it so.'* (Candidate J)

*'First, I'm calmer, I'm not confrontational. If people attack me I am not attacking back...other times I would have reacted offensively.'* (Candidate A)

*'I try to measure myself against my colleagues. I can see in some situations that, I could handle it more calmly. Because I know I asked for grace...I could see the difference between myself and the next person in relation to the same task. So it was basically easy for me.'* (Candidate G)

*'If I now look at my experiences a few years back...I was spiritually very immature. I was very quick (to act). I sometimes spoke too quickly. I would say I have grown a lot spiritually. So I always try to be calm.'* (Candidate I)

*'I think if I can be more spiritual...I have somewhat of a temper, then I won't take people on that quickly. See people who are spiritual are much calmer. They listen, they don't just attack. I think that will help me. Yes you see, I attack if I must. Sometimes I am quick to do that, which maybe sometimes is not necessary.'* (Candidate H)

(b) *Sub-theme: Positive attitude*

Another sub-theme that emerged from the interviews was that a positive attitude is associated with spirituality, and that you cannot separate one from the other (Rowe & Allen, 2003). Spirituality facilitates coping by inspiring positive attitudes, given that participants are motivated to tap into their best, despite negative situations. This positive attitude leads people to want to make changes in their situations for the better (Kourie, 2009, p. 168), as illustrated below:

*'And then I cannot bring spirituality and negativity together...'* (Candidate F)

*'I don't want to disappoint my God. So I'm going to do my best, for every day He gives me his best. So I will not give Him second best.'* (Candidate A)

*'And everything we do, regardless of the negativity, you will only be rewarded. But there is more positivity in the spirituality, than negativity.'* (Candidate D)

*'I thank Him that I was here yesterday, and that He helps me through the day, and making the best of a bad situation.'* (Candidate C)

(c) *Sub-theme: Forgiveness*

Spirituality fosters forgiveness, and it seems that forgiveness helps the individual to overcome disappointment and move on in life (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 275). Thus, forgiveness facilitates coping by helping traffic officers to voluntarily change how they feel about an offense or negative occurrence, and ultimately how they respond. Spirituality enables the person not only to extend forgiveness, but also creates the willingness to ask for forgiveness, as is evident from the following statements:

*'We apply the rule of forgive and forget...there's where forgiveness comes in.'*  
(Candidate F)

*'So what happened is the guy drove without a driving licence, and he was acting rough the whole time. And afterwards, he asked for forgiveness. I said, but that's okay sir.'* (Candidate H)

*'That's why I say you cannot always just be right. You must also be able to say ok but I have transgressed, sorry. And you also need to be able to show forgiveness.'*  
(Candidate E)

*'I said... please forgive me, but I did not mean to be rude.'* (Candidate A)

(d) *Sub-theme: Inner strength*

Participants also saw their higher power as a source of strength (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58), which makes it possible to persevere, because they believe that their God is powerful. They genuinely feel that their spirituality 'carries' them in times of need, so that they can withstand the demands of the job. Therefore, this inner strength enables them to cope, as reflected by the following experiences:

*'And I passed...not by my own power, God's power and God's grace...'*  
(Candidate D)

*'The Lord just took my hand every day...He will carry me.'* (Candidate A)

*'I always ask for strength from above. And it's one of the things that makes me strong and carries me through.'* (Candidate J)

(e) *Sub-theme: Awareness*

Spirituality leads to an increased sense of awareness (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004, p. 32), which includes the awareness of the self, of God, and of others. The awareness of negative consequences also emerged (Chopko, 2007, p. 89), thus the consideration of other people and their emotions, or the effects of one's actions or words on others. The traffic officers are required to relate to all the different road users with their diverse needs and frustrations (Pienaar, 2007, p. 60). They feel they need to be reasonable yet fair in the execution of their duties. Thus, they should be understanding and aware of how they treat others, as illustrated below:

*'You as a traffic officer places yourself in his position. There must be a thought of God...a thought of: what am I busy with?'* (Candidate F)

*'And to be able to tell yourself, but I am now busy rubbing someone the wrong way or to offend someone, you also have that inner sense of, but I was wrong...I cannot just be right. And also experience guilt if you are wrong.'* (Candidate E)

*'There were many instances in my work, just the way that you handle drivers...you go into a spiritual discussion with them, and it inspired me again...'* (Candidate G)

*'Because sometimes you can give misleading messages with your body language...maybe you say something positive but your body language reflects something negative. So I guard against that.'* (Candidate I)

### 3.3.2 Coping

Participants shared their thoughts on coping by answering the following open-ended questions:

*How do you cope in the workplace?*

*Which mechanisms do you use to help you cope?*

The four themes that emerged from the data relating to the traffic officers' experiences on coping (Table 3.3) were the following: (1) upbringing and background, (2) stressors, and (3) coping mechanisms. These themes and their sub-themes are discussed next.

**Table 3.3:**

Coping themes and sub-themes

Construct	Themes	Sub-themes
Coping	Upbringing and background	
	Stressors	Work conditions
		Treatment from others
		Inadequate coping mechanisms
	Coping mechanisms	Positive attitudes
		Thankfulness
		Recreation

#### 3.3.2.1 Theme: Upbringing and background

Human context is vital to understanding coping (Moos, 2002, p. 67), and similarly background and upbringing emerged as a powerful theme under coping as well. The background included communities plagued by gangsterism, crime, violence, alcohol and drugs, poverty and peer pressure. Traffic officers revealed that circumstances during childhood also developed their coping abilities, as beliefs, morals, and spiritual values were instilled by parents and others during childhood.

Thus, they appear to have been taught adaptive coping mechanisms at a young age. This theme emerged through the following experiences:

*'And the environment I grew up in, I was exposed to so many negative things that happened...gangsterism and so forth, and then I decided I won't participate in this thing of gangsterism, I won't drink, I won't smoke...and where it might be stressful...it was easy for me to escape.'* (Candidate B)

*'See we did not grow up rich. So I could quickly see that things are not as they should be. So yes I was satisfied with little...you press through...try to understand. Even on that level, I could apply my mind, saying to myself: it is not good, but, you've got the basics. And I could build on those principles.'* (Candidate E)

*'I think I know why my childhood was the way it was. I learnt to be self-sufficient, to stand on my own feet, to work for what I want. If it was any other way I would not have been as successful as I am today.'* (Candidate H)

*'Were it not for my family such as my aunties and my uncles and my parents, were it not for the values they had and the faith they had, then I may not be the person I am today. So I learned a lot from them.'* (Candidate A)

### 3.3.2.2 Theme: Stressors

The traffic work environment presents a number of stressors (Mushwana, 1998, p. 134) which require coping skills on the part of traffic officers. The effects of stressors on traffic officers may manifest as aggression and frustration, and may adversely affect relationships with others (Pienaar, 2007, p. 93). Under the theme of stressors, the data analysis yielded the following sub-themes: (a) work conditions, (b) treatment from others, and (c) inadequate coping mechanisms.

(a) *Sub-theme: Work conditions*

The traffic officers' work conditions present high risks (Mushwana, 1998, p. 134), such as threats arising from incidents, crime, and possibly being involved in accidents themselves. They are also exposed to scenarios which are potentially brutal such as accident scenes. Thus, the work conditions may affect or change the traffic officers on an emotional and psychological level (Edwards, 1992, p. 245). Mention was also made of the shift work, which can make work challenging. This is because shift work and odd working hours can be exhausting, thus negatively affecting physical well-being as well. These experiences emerged as follows:

*'It happens a lot that when we are driving, it is as if you would have been in an accident. Just for the reason that I put myself under the blood, then it is as if the accident gets averted.'* (Candidate A)

*'Say you are standing off at an accident scene, where people was...beheaded and loosing limbs and...after that you just go back onto the road and just continue with your duties...at the end of a shift...it is expected of you to still be humane.'* (Candidate B)

*'Especially given all that is going on around us...we put up with crime, we are left with so many other related serious issues. It's hard, I work shifts, at night I came home late.'* (Candidate D)

(b) *Sub-theme: Treatment from others*

Treatment from others emerged as the traffic officers are often having to deal with negative attitudes from road users (Pienaar, 2007, p. 63), poor treatment by colleagues, and unfounded accusations from the public. Thus, participants may employ various ways to cope with this treatment from others, such as altering their perceptions around this treatment or the significance they attach to it (Edwards, 1992, p. 257). They may also cope by altering distressed relationships between themselves and others, and by regulating the emotional distress they experience

(Boehmer et al., 2007, p. 63). Nonetheless, treatment from others may cause frustration, as illustrated by the following experiences:

*'You cannot use your own initiative. It gets frustrating, and this is where people begin to say: but you do not worry, why should I worry? Then you switch off as I say.'* (Candidate C)

*'It's easy for a member of the public to come in and say that you took money or something, to accuse you of that. The immediate thing that happens after that is, you are being brought in...you are being dealt with as if it happened.'* (Candidate B)

*'That darkness...issues that people sometimes create themselves in the workplace. It is circumstances that...sometimes unbearable. You should know that in the workplace, you have different people. And then one must not forget that professional jealousy.'* (Candidate D)

*'I pulled over a guy...I'm thinking why did he first have to shout at me? Because I was not wrong.'* (Candidate H)

*'When I am confronted with becoming angry too quickly...when someone treated you unfairly, or when I had a difficult member of the public who spoke to me rudely...or the community wants to interfere...'* (Candidate I)

(c) *Sub-theme: Inadequate coping mechanisms*

Various stressors present challenges that the traffic officers face daily (Mushwana, 1998, p. 3), the causes of which originate from their internal and external work environments. Coping mechanisms and counselling services are required at departmental level, to help officers deal with stressors, such as gruesome accident scenes, traumatic incidents, and ill treatment from road users. Thus, participants indicated that there are inadequate coping mechanisms available to them, as illustrated by the following experiences:



*'Many people should receive counselling for those scenes, you know, they cannot deal with those shocks and those scenes.'* (Candidate C)

*'There are about a thousand challenges, but then ways and means to cope, there's only one or two...there wasn't really any infrastructure...I mean in my profession or...should I say within the whole department where you could...say for instance, you're doing an accident and then you go back for counselling. Because, there is so much red tape around everything...'* (Candidate B)

*'Sometimes it can be traumatic...the traumatic incidents for which we are not prepared psychologically, and then it happens, and then it is just left there.'* (Candidate G)

### 3.3.2.3 Theme: Coping mechanisms

Under the theme of coping mechanisms, the data analysis yielded the following sub-themes: (a) positive attitudes, (b) thankfulness, and (c) recreation. Coping mechanisms involved strategies or skills that the traffic officers employ to adapt to and deal with stressors in their work environments, as illustrated by the sub-themes below:

#### (a) Sub-theme: Positive attitudes

Participants stated that it was useful to surround themselves with positive people, with positive attitudes, and to focus on important things in their work environment. Thus, they employ positive ways of thinking in order to cope with their world of work (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 1), and this seems to help them deal with the negativity and the challenges that they may face:

*'I avoid people that complain, who say negative things about colleagues or of management.'* (Candidate I)

*'And internally I think is one's attitude...and come to work much more positively. I know it's not easy, but I tried it and it works for me.'* (Candidate H)

*'And I always keep a positive attitude despite negative things that happen around me.'* (Candidate J)

*'Sometimes people really get into a zone of negativity...conditions at the workplace, but I think there are other tools in order to rise above those circumstances, to make the workplace better for you.'* (Candidate D)

*'Rather deal with things that are important...then you have a much better product at the end of the day rather than to see what you do wrong and just focus on that.'* (Candidate E)

(b) Sub-theme: *Thankfulness*

It seems that coping is also made possible by being thankful to God. Thankfulness exists in the midst of challenges, because there is a sense of something bigger than the self. Participants expressed thankfulness as an appreciation toward God or others for their value to their lives. Even in retrospect, they can look back to the contributions of parents or friends, which enabled them to survive challenging situations, and to use that grateful feeling in order to cope in the now. The following experiences reflect these notions:

*'So what I have achieved in the traffic, the last 5, 6 years, all thanks to my Creator.'* (Candidate D)

*'Well every day when I get up then I thank the good Lord.'* (Candidate C)

*'Like today when I finished working with a colleague. I say thank God for this day, because we could work so well together...I will have to plow back to the Lord to give thanks for what he has done for me.'* (Candidate H)

*'And then as I look back, I can only say thank you for a parent like her. With the little that she had, and what we had to survive with.'* (Candidate E)

(c) *Sub-theme: Recreation*

The traffic officers indicated that they benefit from recreational activities as an outlet for stresses. These include cycling, exercising, spending time with family and friends, or participating in sports. The effects of stressors manifest on both the psychological and physical levels (Edwards, 1992, p. 245), and recreational activities directly affect physical well-being and thus coping. The following experiences illustrate how the traffic officers use recreation as a coping mechanism:

*'Say you are standing off at an accident scene. You see all of those things. How to cope with it...I would just jump onto my bicycle and go cycling, or go to the gym and so.'* (Candidate B)

*'I also coped by making some time for exercise in the morning before work...'*  
(Candidate G)

*'So I will always be with my family or with my friends when they play sports and so...because of the pressure I find at work. As I now exercise and eat healthy it will help me to relief a little stress. On my weekends off I will drive out a little bit, just to clear my head...'* (Candidate I)

### **3.3.3 The role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers**

Participants shared their experiences on the role of spirituality in their coping by answering the following open-ended question:

*How do you use spirituality as a coping mechanism in the workplace?*

The data analysis yielded two themes related to the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers (Figure 3.2), being the interpretation of spirituality and the implementation of spirituality.

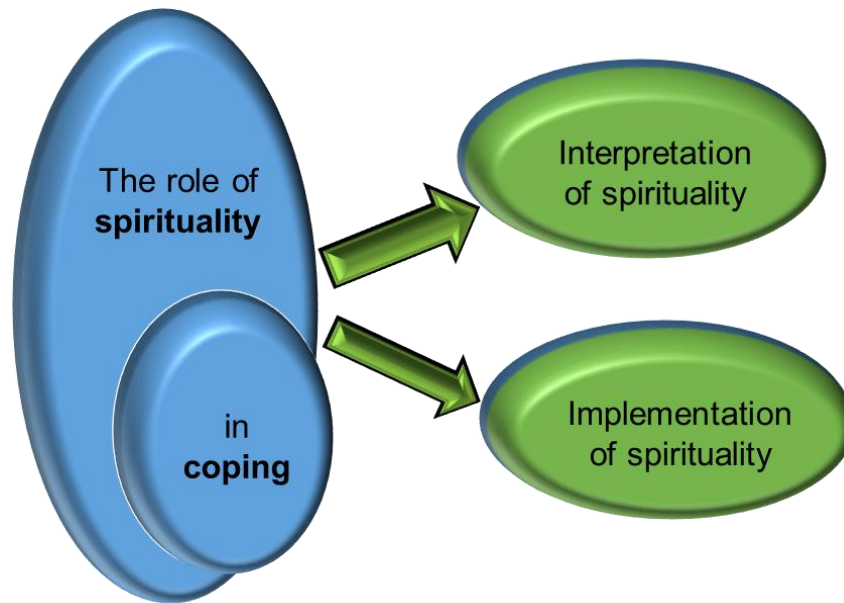


Figure 3.2: Sub-themes of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers

### 3.3.3.1 Theme: Interpretation of spirituality

It appears from participants that their spirituality entails an interpretation of spirituality. This ability may be taught during childhood by parents at home, teachers at school or Sunday school, or just by conversing with others on scriptures. One participant conveyed that, even when he could not make sense of spirituality as a child, it was still explained to him by a parent according to the parent's own understanding. This ability to interpret the meaning of spirituality deepens their understanding of the positive fruits of spirituality. Ultimately, positive thoughts contribute significantly to effective coping ability (Rowe & Allen, 2003). This theme is reflected by the following experiences:

*'I re-learned how to sit with the Bible, and to work through the scriptures. Ask what you understand in the scriptures that I perhaps do not understand.'* (Candidate A)

*'Tuesdays we have Bible study where we talk extensively about topics which strengthen us spiritually.'* (Candidate I)

*'And even like the scriptures that my cousin sends me, some I don't understand right away. But then later on I see ok but that's what they meant.'* (Candidate C)

*'Everyone has a different view of how the Word is to be interpreted. Your foundation forms the basis on how you should understand it.'* (Candidate F)

*'My spirituality goes back to my childhood. And for that I am quite thankful for my parents. In most cases any way I did not even understand or believe it. Now I'm a little older and bigger...but now I have my answer.'* (Candidate E)

The ability to understand others and their views, and to respond to them in caring ways are linked to effective coping ability (Krishnakumar et al., 2014, p. 21) Thus, an interpretation of spirituality or scriptures also facilitates better coping by enhancing social connections in the traffic officers, as reflected by the following experiences:

*'If God did not give me the guidance to work with them (younger colleagues) I would not have been able to cope. Because nowadays working with young people is no joke...they have their own mind-set, they have their own will.'* (Candidate A)

*'I can give you quoted verses out of it (the Bible) that I learned as a child...out of what I learned when I was involved in the youth. If I were to talk to a father on the road, and I found him and he talked on the cell phone, then I can address that guy from the Word of God.'* (Candidate F)

*'If I did not have that (spirituality) I would not have coped. I used to handle my colleagues incorrectly. I just wanted to see my own point of view. Where I am now...my coping skills are much better.'* (Candidate I)

### *3.3.3.2 Theme: Implementation of spirituality*

The implementation of the spirituality theme reflects how life is understood through lived experiences (Welzen, 2011, p. 38). It involves how the traffic officers apply what spirituality means to them within the work context and life, and how this

enables them to cope better. In the interviews it emerged that it is the application of the spiritual values or lessons that facilitates coping in their internal and external workplace.

Participants' experiences reflected the importance of viewing their work in a spiritual way, in order to persist in their jobs, and to remain peaceful and unchanged by the challenges in the traffic work environment. It is also within the context of the external work environment of traffic officers that one participant introduced the concept 'spirituality on the road'. This concept also complements the experiences of some other participants as illustrated below:

*'It's like I have just re-discovered the stuff, but I just have not applied it daily...I now have learned to apply it in the workplace.'* (Candidate A)

*'And with the implementation of what that (spirituality) means, I cope accordingly.'* (Candidate B)

*'If you are not led by the Lord, you do not get any knowledge or wisdom from the Lord, because nothing you do will be of value. You will just do or go to work because you have to. The Lord must give you that guidance, and those values to enable you to cope with everything through the day.'* (Candidate A)

*'Because if I do not see it in the spiritual way, then I would've exploded a long time ago...then you are only on the war path. You should still be able to stand, even though you are angry. You must still be able to go on. You must still be the same person.'* (Candidate E)

*'But it seems the longer I am here (at work), it is only going better with me. Forget salaries and those things...I am enjoying my work despite the difficult circumstances...my spirituality carries me through.'* (Candidate J)

*'Where your traffic officer do similar work to the police officer, but he also takes it a little broader than the police officer in terms of training, by means of the spirituality on the road...to prepare yourself mentally for the job.'* (Candidate F)

### **3.4 DISCUSSION**

The general aim of this research was to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. Specific aims relating to the literature review were to conceptualise spirituality, to conceptualise coping, and to explore the theoretical link between coping and spirituality in the place of work.

Specific aims relating to the empirical study were to gain a better understanding of how traffic officers experience the role of spirituality in coping within the South African context, and to provide a framework that can assist in this understanding. The final empirical aim was to formulate recommendations for possible future research within the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, specifically employee and organisational wellness, and career counselling.

#### **3.4.1 Main contributions of this study**

The following discussion portrays the main themes and sub-themes that emerged from this study. It also considers the contributions from literature which support the findings, when specifically referenced in-text. The purposive sampling method meant that participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate voluntarily and provide meaningful information on the research topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). It is therefore possible that mostly spiritual-minded individuals volunteered because they knew the purpose of the research. Thus, the research findings showed that traffic officers in the sample all utilised spirituality to various extents, and that they exhibited adaptive coping abilities when they did so. They associated less spirituality or a lack thereof with weaker coping abilities.

### **3.4.2 Experiences of spirituality in traffic officers**

The exploration of spirituality in traffic officers required consideration of the individual's entire existence. In this regard Kourie (2009, p. 151) described the importance of viewing a person's holistic existence. For the purpose of this study, I viewed spirituality as individuals' experiences of the Divine on the journey of meaningful authentic self-discovery, which entails how they express these experiences through actions and attitudes (Karakas, 2010, p. 8; Lombaard, 2011, p. 77).

Most participants viewed spirituality or religion as the foundation of their life and existence, which is characterised by the influence of a higher power. The majority valued their upbringing within spirituality or religion, as this is where they were introduced to spirituality. Participants mainly viewed spirituality and religion as the same, as these values are primarily based on spiritual or religious frameworks. This view also corresponds with studies conducted by Christian (2003, p. 97) and Naidoo (2014, p. 3).

Jacobs (2013, p. 164) emphasised the importance of contextual factors in the development of spirituality. In the current study each traffic officer has unique manifestations of the concept of spirituality in their lives. Upbringing, whether made up of good or bad circumstances, may shape the character of participants through the influence of spiritual values. These values, morals and beliefs may be taught to them by parents, teachers, or some other source, and often at a young age during their upbringing. Individuals grow up to remember the spiritual lessons and, if they choose, it enables them to create better circumstances and realities for themselves.

Spirituality dictates the participants' existence to various degrees, by influencing their belief system and the realities they create for themselves. This corresponds with a study by Ponterotto (2005, p. 130) where spirituality was shown to influence the realities people construct for themselves. The traffic officers indicated that spirituality gives them direction and focus that dictate their



actions. This spiritual reality represents a truth that participants strive toward, as was reflected in literature by Leedy and Ormrod (2010, p. 135).

Spirituality provides purpose to the work and lives of participants which becomes their motivation. Mohan and Uys (2006, p. 58) showed how spirituality makes it possible to view events or work as meaningful and valuable to yourself and to those around you. Traffic officers, in terms of the inherent requirements of the occupation, must serve, protect, and guide road users by means of the application of the law. Hall and Chandler (2005, p. 1) described how the passion for a job enables people to view it as a calling. In some instances, participants can link their duties, and daily interactions, with what is expected of humans in general in terms of the scriptures or religion. Spirituality becomes a reality and a truth for those who believe and have faith in their spiritual source. They make decisions and take spiritually informed actions based on this truth.

Spirituality involves a connection to or a relationship with something bigger than the self (Karakas, 2010, p. 8; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008, p. 319). Similarly, the experiences of participants included a connection to a spiritual source. They need to sustain this connection by means of involvement in church, prayer or by utilising spiritual resources. Traffic officers in this study nurture this relationship with their higher power by listening to spiritual music, conversing with family and friends on spiritual issues, or by reading spiritual material. The spiritual resources facilitate better coping by making them mentally and emotionally receptive to spiritual lessons.

Spirituality manifests as emotional and behavioural resources, or as fruits of spirituality, in the lives of the participants. Fruits of spirituality comprise the values, characteristics, and visible manifestations of the relationship with the spiritual source. For example, they indicated that keeping a positive attitude helps them cope with adversities. This is in line with literature which showed that the application of positive thoughts is associated with higher spirituality (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

Participants in the current study were able to reflect on experiences of lesser or greater presence of spirituality on their journey. They associated less spirituality or

the absence thereof with weaker coping abilities, as it affects their ability to remain calm when provoked for instance. Further, they rely on their spirituality for strength and courage in their interactions with others. It also provides protection, guidance and stability to participants within a very unpredictable and turbulent traffic law enforcement environment. These positive associations reflect the location of spirituality in the field of Positive Psychology, as supported by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 5) as well as Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004, p. 26).

Participants may employ spirituality on the road to act with forgiveness, despite the negative attitudes of road users that they often encounter. This is in line with the notion that individuals can dictate their own well-being (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 8) by practising forgiveness, spirituality and religion (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 275).

Spirituality entails looking within yourself, and becoming aware of your higher self that seeks to be purposeful in work and life (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 11). Similarly, the development of awareness also emerged under fruits of spirituality. The ability of participants to reflect on their experiences is especially important within the context of temptations and ulterior motives that may be presented by both their internal and external work environment. Spirituality is not a once-off phenomenon, but a journey (Karakas, 2010, p. 8). Correspondingly, the participants considered the constant challenges in their work, and found it necessary to regularly return to their spiritual source to be replenished and revitalised, both physically and psychologically. Thus, they viewed spirituality as a genuine lived experience informed by the nature of a higher spirit in all facets of life, as also described in Naidoo (2014, p. 3).

### **3.4.3 Experiences of coping in traffic officers**

For the purpose of this study coping was viewed as the efforts employed by individuals to reduce the negative influences of stress on personal well-being, which may involve individual resources as well as their perceptions they have of challenges (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 73; Edwards, 1988, p. 243).

Upbringing and background seemed to play a significant role in the coping abilities of participants. During their childhood they were influenced by the communities or circumstances in which they grew up, and experienced how others coped with problems at hand. Moos (2002, p. 67) emphasised the importance of human context in understanding coping. The upbringing of many participants involved exposure to hardship and challenges, which aided in developing the ability to cope with life and its demands at an early age.

In the traffic environment, participants are presented with various stressors which require coping skills in the workplace. These stressors resonate in their working conditions through demanding shifts, gruesome accident scenes and the threat of crime. In line with Mushwana (1998, p. 134) these factors illustrate the high risks, both physically and emotionally, associated with this profession.

Participants also indicated they encounter people from all walks of life on the road – from different professions, backgrounds and cultures. The public bring with them their own stressors and societal problems, which they may project onto the traffic officers when pulled over for example. They may typically end up on the receiving end of public frustration and negative attitudes, in keeping with Pienaar (2007, p. 63). Therefore, the traffic officers found it necessary to be understanding and to place themselves in the shoes of the road user, in order to cope with and better understand these negative attitudes.

Inadequate coping mechanisms emerged as another stressor of traffic officers. They indicated that measures to help them deal with the emotional consequences of attending to traumatic incidents and/or accident scenes are either not sufficient or not available. One officer referred to all of the red-tape involved in obtaining such employee assistance.

Participants may employ various coping mechanisms in order to deal with the stressors presented by the traffic work environment. These include maintaining a positive attitude, thinking positive thoughts and showing thankfulness. The traffic officers expressed thankfulness as an appreciation toward God or others for the

valuable contributions made to their lives. This reflects the notion in literature that people do have the power to overcome barriers to happiness in their environments, through employing mindful actions such as these (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 1). The effects of stressors manifest on the psychological and physical levels (Edwards, 1992, p. 245), thus the traffic officers also coped by taking part in recreational activities. They indicated that activities such as cycling, exercising, and spending time with family and friends help to alleviate stress.

#### **3.4.4 Experiences of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers**

Research findings show that the role of spirituality in coping of the traffic officers results firstly from their ability to interpret and understand the meaning spirituality brings to their lives. The beliefs, morals, and spiritual values instilled by parents or through other interventions during childhood such as schooling, may be carried with them into adulthood. Generally, individuals attach great value to how they were shaped by the neighbourhoods or stressful circumstances in which they grew up, for these experiences enable them to cope in their profession. The interpretation of the meaning of spirituality involves acquiring a deeper understanding of the positive fruits of spirituality.

Rowe and Allen (2003) showed that persons measuring high in spirituality cope effectively by using positive thoughts. Krishnakumar et al. (2014, p. 21) associate the ability to understand others, and to respond to them compassionately, with effective coping ability. Correspondingly, the current study showed that a deeper spiritual understanding facilitates better coping in the traffic officers by, for example, nurturing positive attitudes and by enhancing the social connections they share with others.

Secondly, participants indicated that it was the implementation of spirituality that facilitated better coping. Naidoo (2014, p. 3) stated that spirituality entails a lived experience guided by a higher power which affects all aspects of one's life. Similarly, the participants could reflect on their lived experiences and indicated that spirituality facilitates coping, when they utilise the fruits of spirituality in

stressful situations. The implementation of spirituality also involves viewing work in a spiritual way, which enables them to persevere in their jobs, to not become angry or agitated, and to be less affected by the challenges of their occupation. The actual application of spirituality in the traffic work environment was best described by one participant through the concept of 'spirituality on the road'. To this effect participants particularly found spirituality on the road useful to cope better with external challenges and dangers, and to be driven by a greater purpose when they feel like giving up.

This study applied the concepts of spirituality and religion interchangeably, because the two concepts very much overlapped in participants' experiences. This corresponded with views on spirituality as considered by Collet (2011, p. 59). In order to cope, the traffic officers in the sample continually need to revert back to their spiritual source or higher power for guidance, strength and perseverance. It does not mean that coping is easy, but it appears to be easier when the traffic officers cope by means of spirituality. This also supports literature that people may respond differently when confronted with similar demands (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1). For example, participants were able to compare how spiritual individuals seem to be more positive and calmer than others, when given the same challenges in the workplace.

This study revealed that the sub-themes obtained from the traffic officers' experiences pertaining to spirituality and coping overlapped in noteworthy ways. It reflects the very significant role that spirituality plays in their coping abilities. For example, upbringing and/or background emerged as a sub-theme in spirituality and as a theme in coping. Thus, for the most part, both spirituality and coping were developed during the traffic officer's childhood already, and coping ability was a product of the upbringing within spirituality. Similarly, positive attitudes emerged as a fruit of spirituality, and also as a coping mechanism. In fact, as described in the experiences of traffic officers, it is the application of the fruits of spirituality to stressful situations which facilitates their coping in the traffic work environment.

### **3.4.5 A framework towards understanding the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers**

The following framework was derived (Figure 3.3) from the contributions of the participants, and reflects their experiences regarding the role of spirituality in their coping as traffic officers:

- Stressor occurs – It is sometimes expected of the traffic officers to still remain humane and unaffected, at the end of a shift, when something stressful happened to them.
- Connect to spiritual source – In challenging times individuals need to take themselves back to that emotional place where they can tap into their spiritual source or higher power.
- Interpretation of spirituality – The connection to the spiritual source enables the individual to become aware of what their spiritual source means to them, and how they are being served spiritually by this higher power.
- Extracting the fruits of spirituality – The individuals then take this spiritual meaning, and extract what they need at the time, for example inner strength, self-confidence, or perseverance to deal with the given stressor.
- Implementation of spirituality – The spiritual resources received are then taken and utilised in work and in life.
- Coping made possible – With the implementation of what spirituality means to the individual, or by applying the fruits of spirituality to the stressful situation, adaptive coping is made possible.

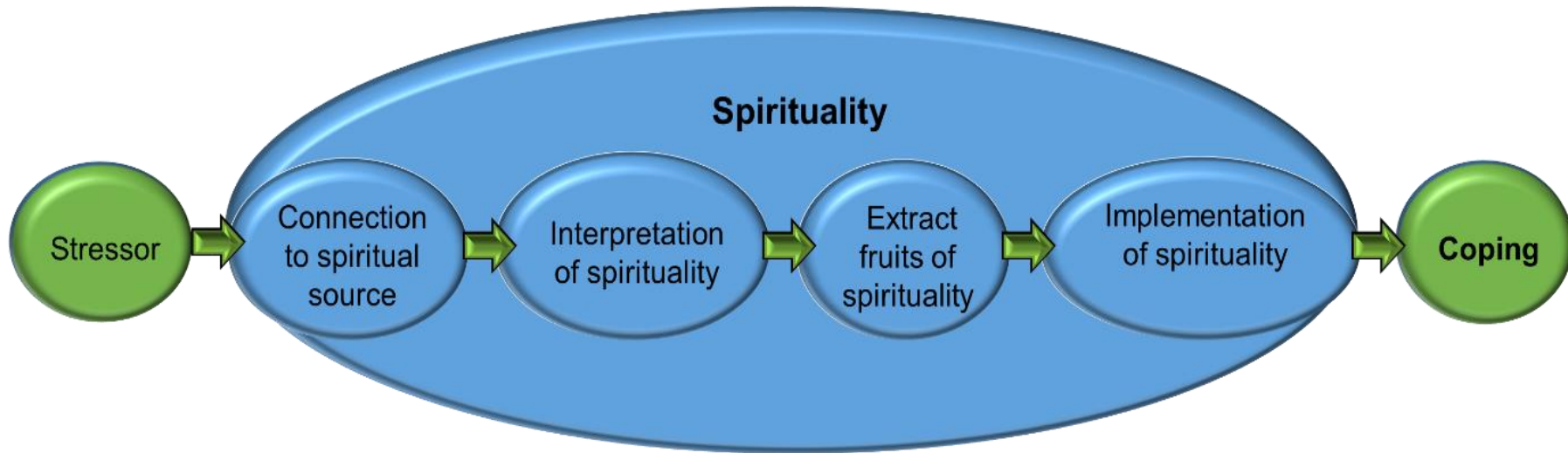


Figure 3.3: Framework towards understanding the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers

The study intended to fill the gap in current research on the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. Traffic officers work in stressful environments in which they may be required to call upon their own spirituality to cope with the threats and demands inherent to their jobs. Professionals involved in the well-being of traffic officers, as well as other law enforcement officers, may find value in this framework by understanding how spirituality can enable them to cope better with the stressors presented by the traffic work environment and life. The organisation may benefit from understanding this phenomenon, as this study confirmed research indicating that individuals with higher spirituality exhibit better coping abilities (Rowe & Allen, 2003).

### **3.5 CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that this study helped to broaden our understanding of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers within the South African context. The qualitative study with its exploratory nature facilitated the journey participants took into their complex and unique experiences pertaining to the research topic. In this manner, the research facilitated the conceptualisation of spirituality and coping within the particular context of the traffic officer's work environment – both internal and external. In line with existing literature on spirituality and coping in general, this study found that traffic officers cope differently when presented with similar stressors.

Furthermore, research findings showed that traffic officers in the sample all utilised spirituality to various extents, and that they exhibited adaptive coping abilities when doing so. They associated less spirituality or a lack of spirituality with weaker coping abilities. It was found that spirituality in traffic officers is informed by their foundation of spirituality or religion, purpose to work and life, the connection to their spiritual source, and the fruits of spirituality. Their coping ability was influenced by their upbringing and background, as well as by stressors encountered and coping mechanisms employed. The role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers is ultimately described by their ability to interpret the meaning of spirituality and the implementation of spirituality, which facilitate coping.



Finally a framework was provided to assist in creating an understanding of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers, which may be useful to traffic officers, traffic managers, human resource practitioners, as well as industrial and organisational psychologists. This empirical research aim was achieved by converting the experiences of traffic officers into a practical framework. The framework reflects how spirituality is employed when the traffic officer is presented with a stressor, typically from the work environment.

This spiritual process is one in which the traffic officer connects to a spiritual source by means of practices such as praying, involvement in church, or other spiritual resources. This connection facilitates the interpretation of spirituality, which deepens the understanding of what spirituality means to the individual. Armed with this understanding, the traffic officer can now extract what is needed from the spiritual source as required in order to deal with the stressor. They extract fruits of spirituality, which may include calmness, positive attitudes, forgiveness, inner strength and enhanced awareness. The implementation of spirituality in relation to the stressors from the traffic work environment, or applying what was extracted from the spiritual source, is what enables the traffic officer to cope better.

### **3.6 LIMITATIONS**

Limitations of this study relate to bias, because the researcher used to be a colleague of some of the participants and is very familiar with the organisational settings. She is a qualified traffic officer and has extensive working experience as both an officer and a manager in the traffic law enforcement and administrative environments. This familiarity, however, allowed the researcher to gain access to, and participation from otherwise very reluctant and exclusive groups.

Possible bias also related to the purposive sampling method, as participants were chosen intentionally, and based on their willingness to provide adequate information on the research topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). Since potential participants must be informed of the research purpose it may be that only individuals with spiritual orientations volunteered. Further, the interaction with the participants was

subjective in nature (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 276) and the researcher was the primary person responsible for data analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135). The researcher used the pre-established trust between researcher and participant to eliminate some of the bias by having respondents comment on results in order to validate findings.

Respondents were available from selected Traffic Service Centres, thus the generalisability of the findings to other work environments of the same kind may be compromised. However, most of the participants could provide experiences from more than one station in which they have served in their careers thus far. Nevertheless, this study was qualitative in nature and the researcher strived for transferability of findings, due to the strong limits on the generalisability of the findings.

Future qualitative research may be applied to a larger sample, to determine if more themes may emerge in relation to the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The researcher did not manage to make the sample fully representative in terms of race and different religions. However, this study was never intended to have a cultural or religious focus.

### **3.7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations may include the replication of the study with respondents from a wider variety of South African Traffic Services Centres. Future research on the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers can also be expanded upon from the current study by considering the influences of race, age, and gender. Future research may also consider the latest relevance of spirituality in different religious contexts (Jacobs, 2013, p. 144), as well as traffic officers who do not utilise spirituality at all.

This study was intended to contribute towards the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, in particular the subfields of employee and organisational wellness and career counselling. The enhanced understanding of the

role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers can assist professionals, who want to make a meaningful contribution to this profession, to facilitate the optimal psychological well-being of traffic officers in the workplace. This knowledge can also inform career counselling practices to address the individual's career-related issues in organisations and non-work influencing factors that lead to career conflict.

### **3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter Three took the format of an article and described the empirical approach and the relevant literature available on the research topic. The empirical study was also described in detail. This chapter also contains the findings of the study as obtained through following an interpretive approach and using content analysis. The chapter is concluded with the conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research as derived from this study.

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## **4. CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The aim of this study was to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers, and Chapter Four brings the dissertation to completion by fulfilling the research methodology put forward in Chapter One. The literature review served to conceptualise the concepts of spirituality and coping, while the humanistic as well as the post-modern approaches were utilised to uncover the stated aim.

Hence, this chapter starts with the conclusions drawn, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the current study. The final section presents the recommendations to facilitate the optimal psychological well-being of traffic officers in the workplace, as well as for career counselling practices. Recommendations are also given for future research in the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

#### **4.1 CONCLUSIONS**

This section contains the research conclusions pertaining to the literature review as well as the empirical study.

##### **4.1.1 Conclusions pertaining to the literature review**

The general aim of this research was to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. This required an understanding and contextualisation of the concepts of spirituality and coping as it pertains to the world of traffic officers.

The specific aims of the research served to achieve the general aim of the research. Conceptualisation of the constructs of spirituality and coping and the link between the two are reflected by the conclusions drawn on each specific aim next, as informed by the literature.

#### *4.1.1.1 The first aim: Conceptualising spirituality*

Spirituality was conceptualised in Chapter Two, and the following conclusions can be drawn:

Literature informed the view that spirituality is defined as individuals' experiences of the Divine on their journey of meaningful authentic self-discovery, and involves how they express these experiences through actions and attitudes (Lombaard, 2011, p. 77; Karakas, 2010, p. 8). It was found that expressions of spirituality reflect the postmodern assumption that no one truth exists, and that it is impossible to explore spirituality without looking at a person's existence holistically (Jacobs, 2013, p. 164; Kourie, 2009, p. 151). Further, religion and spirituality can coincide, and do not automatically have to oppose each other (Kourie, 2009, p. 153; Rowe & Allen, 2003).

#### *4.1.1.2 The second aim: Conceptualising coping*

In this study the researcher views coping as the efforts employed by individuals to reduce the negative influences of stress on personal well-being, which may include the use of individual resources as well as how they perceive challenges (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 73; Edwards, 1988, p. 243). In line with this is the general view that coping encompasses a person's views of life, mental abilities and chosen behaviours which aid in facing diversities (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 383). Due to the influence of human context on coping, individuals may employ different efforts to combat stress when given similar life stressors (Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1; Moos, 2002, p. 67).

#### *4.1.1.3 The third aim: Exploring the theoretical link between spirituality and coping in the place of work*

Individuals may respond differently in the face of similar challenges, and literature reflects that the spiritual dimension may be helpful in developing coping strategies (Gnanaprakash, 2013, p. 383; Louw & Viviers, 2010, p. 1). Police work contains a spiritual component because they fight for good, may not be valued in society, and face threats and death daily (Smith & Charles, 2010, p. 320). Traffic officers face similar challenges to that of police officers, in that they are at risk of being attacked

by angry motorists, of being thrown off their patrol motor cycles, and of being targeted for their fire arms (Mushwana, 1998, p. 108).

A positive relationship exists between spirituality and coping ability, as persons measuring high in spirituality appear to show a stronger coping style by using positive thoughts (Rowe & Allen, 2003). Facing stresses and finding the meaning of experiences within a religious context through reflection, can help people counter the consequences of negative work experiences (Pienaar et al., 2007, p. 14). When people manage to find meaning and draw strength from adopting a spiritual perspective at work, it enables them to cope better in the workplace (Mohan & Uys, 2006, p. 58).

#### **4.1.2 Conclusions regarding the empirical study**

The specific research aims were achieved through the design of the empirical study, and are given below:

##### *4.1.2.1 Research aim 1: Gaining a better understanding of how traffic officers experience the role of spirituality in coping, within the South African context*

The first empirical research aim was achieved by means of the empirical investigation of the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. The research findings showed that traffic officers in the sample all utilised spirituality in the workplace to various extents, and that they exhibited adaptive coping abilities when doing so. They associated less spirituality or a lack of spirituality with weaker coping abilities. It was found that spirituality in traffic officers are informed by their foundation of spirituality or religion, purpose to work and life, connection to a spiritual source, and fruits of spirituality.

Their coping ability was influenced by their upbringing and their background, by stressors in their work environment and by coping mechanisms employed. The role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers culminated in their ability to interpret the meaning of spirituality, and then implementing spirituality in order to cope.



#### 4.1.2.2 Research aim 2: Providing a framework towards understanding the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers

The second empirical research aim was achieved by converting the information obtained in the first research aim into a practical framework (Figure 4.1). This framework reflects the spiritual process employed by the traffic officer when presented with a stressor from the traffic work environment. This process entails the connection to a spiritual source. This connection facilitates the interpretation of spirituality, which makes it possible to extract what is needed – being the fruits of spirituality – as required in dealing with the stressor. The implementation of spirituality, or applying what was extracted from the spiritual source to the stressful situation, is what enables the traffic officer to cope better.

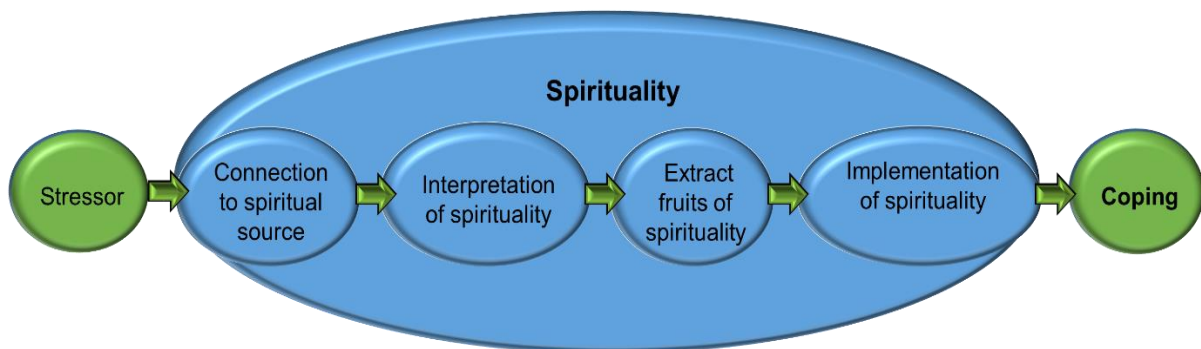


Figure 4.1: Framework towards understanding the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers

#### 4.1.2.3 Research aim 3: Formulating recommendations for possible future research

The third and final empirical research aim was also achieved. It is recommended that the study be replicated to include respondents from a wider variety of South African Traffic Services Centres. Future research may also expand the current study by considering the influences of race, age, and gender as it pertains to the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. Future research may also consider the latest relevance of spirituality in different religious contexts (Jacobs, 2013, p. 144).

## **4.2 LIMITATIONS**

Pertaining to the literature review, only a limited amount of existing research could be found on the role of spirituality on coping specific to traffic officers. For this reason it was a challenge to comprehensively integrate findings from different research within the South African context. In addition, the concepts of spirituality and coping are already complex in literature, and thus difficult to define.

The limitations of the empirical research relate to bias, because the researcher is an ex-colleague of most of the research participants. She is familiar with the research settings and organisational dynamics, having been a traffic officer and manager. Bias may possibly have resulted from the purposive sampling method, given that participants were chosen based on their willingness to provide meaningful information on the research topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). Thus, it may be that only spiritual-minded individuals volunteered. Further, the relationship with participants involved subjective interaction (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 276) and the researcher was the primary person responsible for the data analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135). However, she eliminated some of the bias by conversing with participants in follow-up meetings to validate findings.

The ability to generalise findings to similar organisations may also be compromised, due to the sample size, and given that participants were used from a limited number of Traffic Services Centres only. The researcher dealt with this limitation by involving participants who brought along experiences from more than one station. Further, the qualitative nature of the study allowed for transferability instead.

## **4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In line with the final research aim, the findings, conclusions and limitations of this study inform the recommendations derived. These recommendations will now be discussed.

As mentioned, future research may use a larger sample size to explore the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. Thus, future researchers may broaden the study to include a wider variety of Traffic Services Centres, and consider making the

sample more representative in terms of factors such as race and different religions, and traffic officers who do not practice spirituality.

This research has confirmed that the working environment of traffic officers presents various challenges and stressors. Therefore, traffic managers and human resource practitioners may do well to contribute to the well-being of traffic officers, if they can gain insight into the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers. To this end, the framework developed to understand this phenomenon may be useful to all professionals involved in the careers of traffic officers. Career counsellors as well as Industrial and Organisational psychologists may use this knowledge to better understand issues of adjustment and wellness of traffic officers in the traffic law enforcement environment.

#### **4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter Four summarised the conclusions reached in both the theoretical and empirical studies. The theoretical study resulted in the conceptualisation of spirituality and coping, as well as the establishment of the theoretical link between these two constructs. Similarly, the empirical study resulted in the development of a framework to aid in understanding the role of spirituality in the coping of traffic officers within the South African context. The chapter concluded with discussions on the possible limitations of the research and recommendations for future research.

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## ANNEXURE A: INFORMED CONSENT

### Letter of consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to take part in the research project conducted by Rochelle Dorothy Jacobs as part of the requirements for her master's degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa (Unisa).

For this research on "Exploring the role of spirituality in coping of traffic officers" participants must be current or ex-traffic officers, and are contacted by the researcher personally. Traffic officers are selected based on their willingness to freely share their experiences of the role of spirituality in their coping and/or who have expressed their views on spirituality voluntarily in the past. Participation takes the form of individual interviews with the researcher.

I have been informed that this data may also be used in the analysis required for the publishing of journal articles. I understand that the information that I will supply will be confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone, and that it will only be used in summary form in the research findings. The researcher will protect my identity and hence ensure my privacy and anonymity.

I have also been informed of the following:

- The expected duration of participation is one hour per interview;
- Participation is voluntary and there is no consequences for non-participation;
- Withdrawal can take place at any stage and without reason or consequence, in which case any information that I have supplied will not be used, and any records held relating to my contribution will be destroyed.
- That no potential risks or harm is anticipated due to the study;
- That a copy of the journal article will be provided as feedback.

Finally, the information that I provide will be held securely until the research has been completed and published, after which it will be destroyed. The information that I provide will not be used for any other purpose.

Signed on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2014

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

## **ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

The interview schedule entailed an initial stage in which the participant was prepared for the interview, followed by the interview itself:

### **1. PREPARING THE PARTICIPANT**

In the preparation stage the traffic officers were prepared for the interview by setting them at ease and informing them of the following:

- 1.1. Their rights as participants in the research.
- 1.2. The purpose of the interview.
- 1.3. The reason for their selection.
- 1.4. The anticipated duration of the interview.
- 1.5. That consent must be of their own free will.

### **2. ASKING THE QUESTIONS**

In this section the following open-ended questions were posed to the traffic officers:

- 2.1. *How do you cope in the workplace?*
- 2.2. *Which mechanisms do you use to help you cope?*
- 2.3. *How do you experience spirituality or religion in the workplace?*
- 2.4. *How do you use spirituality as a coping mechanism in the workplace?*

### **3. ENDING THE INTERVIEW (Kelly, 2006b, p. 300)**

The interview ended by asking the participants if they would like to add anything. An appointment or arrangement was made for the next session for triangulation purposes.

## ANNEXURE C: INFORMATIVE LETTER

The Mayor/ Municipal Manager/ Traffic Manager

Ms/Mr/Mrs \_\_\_\_\_

Municipality of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Street

Place

Postal code

Dear Sir/ Madam

INFORMATIVE LETTER: RESEARCH (2014)
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As part of the requirements for the degree Master of Commerce in the subject Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa (Unisa), I am required to conduct a research project commencing 2014. My proposed research topic is: *'Exploring the role of spirituality in coping of traffic officers'*.

Given the nature of the study, ethical aspects concerning informed consent are individual-based, confidential, and participation of traffic officers is voluntary. In the interest of transparency though, I would like to take the time to inform you of my intended research in this regard.

For more information please contact me Rochelle, at details provided below.

Thank you

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mrs R Jacobs

[42750830@unisa.ac.za](mailto:42750830@unisa.ac.za)

[Sel.Littlerock@gmail.com](mailto:Sel.Littlerock@gmail.com)

Cell: 078 106 3309

## ANNEXURE D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

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### DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Date: 16 September 2013

**Dear Rochelle Dorothy Jacobs**

**Student no: 4275 083 0**

#### **RE: APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

This serves to confirm that your application for ethical clearance regarding your research project, "Exploring the role of spirituality in coping of traffic officers" has been approved at Departmental level as per university guidelines and requirements.

Your documents will be forward to the College of Economic Management Science: Research Ethics Committee for record keeping purposes.

For more information you can contact Dr Ophillia Ledimo at 012 429 8219 or email at [manetom@unisa.ac.za](mailto:manetom@unisa.ac.za)

We wish you well with your research project.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "O M Ledimo".

Dr O M Ledimo

(On behalf of the IOP Department Ethics Committee)