The Perception and Impact of Emotional Trauma upon Active Duty Military Personnel

By

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Abstract

Background: Although the risk of emotional trauma and/or comorbid mental illness is on the increase, there remains a dearth in literature studying the experiences of soldiers suffering from emotional trauma resultant from search and rescue (SAR) missions.

Objectives: This study looked to enhance understanding and increase awareness with regards to how military personnel perceive traumatic experiences and explore ways in which the soldiers' lives have changed after experiencing these events.

Design: A qualitative, case-study design, based upon the principles by Yin (2018) was implemented.

Setting: The study took place within the Ammo and Explosive squadron, the Maritime squadron and Airwing section of the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM).

Participants: A homogenous, purposive sample of ten male participants with at least five years' working experience were recruited from the mentioned squadrons.

Methodology: Participants were asked to capture a series of photographs representing events that have left an impact upon them and the changes that this brought about. The imagery was then discussed during a semi-structured interview, which was audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Data analysis for the transcripts was carried out using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, whereas photographic analysis was done using Oliffe et al. 's (2008) approach. Following Yin's guidelines, both within-case analysis and cross-case synthesis were performed.

Results: Three super-ordinate themes emerged, which summarise the essence of living with emotional trauma, namely: *The invisible wounds of pain*, *Winds of change*, and *A distinct language*.

Conclusions: Emotional trauma within the military stems from factors related to various facets of the job and life in general. A considerable number of participants recounted how emotional trauma tends to take over major aspects of their lives, particularly since they have little or no time to wind down from traumatic events. In relation, the participants accounted to posttraumatic growth and admitted to undertaking numerous mechanisms that aid with coping. The study revealed the significance of providing soldiers with tailor-made psychological services and increased awareness surrounding mental health. Additionally, numerous strategies and recommendations were put forth, that can be implemented to overcome the barriers suppressing emotional aid.

Keywords: 'emotional trauma', 'military personnel', 'active soldiers', 'armed forces of Malta', 'case study', 'perception', 'impact'

To

The men who dedicate every ounce of their wellbeing to the welfare of others

Thank you,

For the risks you take

And the sacrifices you make

"We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who

would harm us"

Winston S. Churchill

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Images

List of Abbreviations

AFM	Armed Forces of Malta
APA	American Psychiatric Association
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
CINAHL	Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature
DSM-IV	Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th Edition
DSM-V	Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition
FREC	Faculty Research and Ethics Committee
GRR	Generalised Resistance Resources
NICE	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
PEO	Population, Exposure, Outcome
PTG	Post-traumatic growth
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SAR	Search and rescue
SMH	Salutogenic Model of Health

SOC	Sense of Coherence
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
UK	United Kingdom
UREC	University Research and Ethics Committee
US	United States

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The prevalence of mental illness within the military has been estimated to be around 30% (Coll et al., 2011). In 2013, 28% of male military veterans within the United states (US) were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Koo et al., 2016). Co-morbidities with other mental conditions, including depression, anxiety, suicidality and alcohol misuse have been widely documented (Carlson et al., 2013; Engel, 2013; Keane, 2015; Maguen et al., 2011). Despite remaining largely undiagnosed, researchers have noted increasing rates of symptoms related to mental illness amongst said population. Boyd et al. (2013) emphasise that the emotional struggles of trauma tend to appear between three and twelve months following exposure to any traumatic event, a time period distant enough for anyone to overlook the event itself.

In 2010, Sogomonyan and Cooper published a document in coalition with the National Center for Children in Poverty illustrating the long-term challenges and repercussions created by said trauma upon marital relationships, future employment, as well as rates of violence and aggression. In another document, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2005) explained that soldiers' significant others are also impacted by trauma. It appears, therefore, that the consequences of trauma are

widespread. Getting a sound understanding of the meaning behind living with trauma and the considerable changes that this brings about is crucial, particularly if the impact of trauma upon society at large, is to be reduced.

1.2 Importance of the Study

The Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-V) defines trauma as the exposure to an actual or a threat of death, serious injury or sexual violence, occurring in a violent or accidental manner (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). This exposure must take place either through direct experience, through witnessing the event in person, through learning that such an event has been experienced by a close friend or significant other, or through repeated exposure to the details of the event (Jones & Cureton, 2014). The DSM-V has created a new category for trauma-related stress disorders, highlighting the traumatic events themselves rather than the symptoms consequently experienced. Symptom criteria has been broadened to include not only nightmares, flashbacks, and fear, but even emotional numbing, feelings of guilt or blame, negative emotional states, self-destructive behaviour, avoidance, dissociation and depersonalization (Pai et al., 2017).

Solomon and Heide (1999) defined emotional trauma as "the psychological effects of an event (or events) that cause intense fear, helplessness, or horror and that overwhelm the normal coping and defence mechanisms" (p. 202). The individual's interpretation of a particular event makes emotional trauma subjective in nature, affecting the coping ability and response to that experience.

The connection between trauma and the military was first made during World War I, at a time when the physical and psychological components of trauma became evident amongst military personnel, who were previously screened for mental stability (Pols & Oak, 2007). This left many psychiatrists aghast as to why trauma surfaced within the military and set about to explore the causes behind such ordeal.

Worldwide, the military is interested in the country's defence and the widening of relations with other states (Siebold, 2001). According to Siebold (2001), the military must be regarded as a profession of arms, whereby soldiers are trained to be physically healthy; as a social institution whose beliefs and operations change with changing social ideas; and as an organisation with different ways of functioning. As an organisation, the military has developed a culture embracing specific values, norms, traditions and perceptions, which are daily imposed upon its members (Coll et al., 2011), chiefly the virtues of discipline, honour, courage, obedience and peacefulness. In maintaining peace, direct assaults at individuals that cause mayhem may be necessary and the commands of superiors must be obeyed, even if defying own moral values.

Unsurprisingly, this system of organisation does not allow autonomy. Consequently, members learn to trust their colleagues, particularly in times of survival or life-threatening situations. Furthermore, military culture creates a reality, distant from the wider societal culture (Collins, 1998), leaving its members seeking their true identity and status in society. In trying to understand military culture better, Hall (2011) considered the characteristics that make up the military culture, the most prominent of which appear to be the importance of carrying out a mission successfully and the need to be constantly prepared for disaster.

Military organisations are confronted by several circumstances, which put their members at the forefront of witnessing traumatic events. Not only do most members have to engage in warfare, but they may even be called to engage in rescue operations at sea or on land, to defend civilians in times of crisis, or to aid civil protection services when disasters ensue. Additionally, they have to endure long hours of work or long distances away from home and may be even called in for duty on their days off.

The exposure to disturbing experiences, unpredictable work routine and lack of professional emotional support, often leads to an increase in emotional stress. Additional facets of the military, including stoicism and the suppression of emotional instability or weakness, have also been acknowledged as being leading factors in the causation of emotional trauma (Hall, 2011).

1.3 Local Scenario

Locally, the military is involved with maintaining integrity of the Maltese territory, providing security of the Maltese airspace and conducting search and rescue (SAR) operations within the Maltese territory. Engagement in war and combat is rare (Defense Roles, 2019). That said, this does not place local military personnel at a lower risk of developing emotional trauma.

The Maltese military is made up of various regiments distributed across the Maltese islands. Only the Ammo and Explosive squadron, the Maritime squadron and Airwing are considered as operational, being at the forefront whenever an active procedure, such as a SAR operation or measures involving public safety, is required. The role of these individuals is regularly made public through the media or on-site visits

organised by the AFM itself. Notwithstanding, personnel working within these squadrons are at a higher risk of developing some form of trauma than those carrying out non-operational duties.

In spite of such reality, there are no local statistics depicting the prevalence rates of trauma or any other mental illness amongst military personnel. Furthermore, many researchers appear to have overlooked this population, as illustrated by the small amount of research conducted (Micallef-Grimaud, 2016; Zahra, 2013). Moreover, initial meetings with various high-ranking personnel confirmed that both screening for mental distress and support remains limited and restricted. Only two local organisations provide occasional support, one of which offers private, one-to-one services. This leaves much to be desired in terms of the support network that ought to be in place amongst the local military.

1.4 Personal Reflection

My curiosity to explore the perception and impact of emotional trauma amongst military personnel evolved mainly after nursing veterans at the acute hospital setting within which I work. Being a mental health nurse, I am occasionally confronted by difficulties in caring for someone who has experienced emotional trauma. Such difficulties are usually manifested in uncertainties over how to reach out to this clientele and how to discuss matters related to trauma. This difficulty was also reflected in my misunderstanding and lack of knowledge of what constitutes a military culture and what this instils upon each soldier. Such challenges were observed to be present even amongst other healthcare professionals, who often find it challenging to deliver the most appropriate care to said veterans.

Hence, through this study, it is hoped that enough information is gathered to inspire healthcare professionals in becoming more understanding of the personal experiences and the lasting impact of emotional trauma. It is also hoped that this will yield better-quality care, tailored to meet each soldier's needs.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Quantitative literature surrounding the prevalence of trauma and its co-morbidities amongst soldiers deployed to war is abundant (e.g. Banducci et al., 2016; Chaumba & Bride, 2010; Ferrier-Auerback et al., 2010), as is research concerned with the effects of trauma upon the familial context (e.g. Bakhurst et al., 2018; King & Smith, 2016; Murphy et al., 2017; Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011). Conversely, there is a dearth in experiential, qualitative literature, focusing upon the personal experiences of military personnel conducting SAR missions and the perceived impact thereof upon their overall wellbeing (Wang et al., 2011). This highlights the importance of developing insight into these experiences, in order to develop services and strategies that can target their unique needs.

Therefore, this study was conducted with the aim of exploring military personnel's perception of emotional trauma and the perceived impact thereof. Two research questions were put forth:

- *How do active soldiers interpret traumatic experiences?*

- *How do these experiences affect their coping capabilities?*

A qualitative, case study design, based upon the principles by Yin (2018) was utilised, as it allows for the exploration of a phenomenon of interest in a real-world

context (Cope, 2015) through the utilisation of various data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation were used to collect data, the latter of which was deemed imperative in collecting data about a concept, which is often left suppressed.

1.6 Overview of the Dissertation

This thesis consists of six chapters, composed as follows:

- Chapter 1 depicts an overview of the subject and gives an outline of the reasons for conducting this study

- Chapter 2 presents the theoretical frameworks upon which this work is based, as well as a sound critical appraisal of literature addressing this area of interest

- Chapter 3 outlines the methodology employed for this study, including the rationale for the chosen design, sample population, data collection methods, data analysis and ethical considerations

- Chapter 4 portrays the findings of this study, as based upon the participants' narratives and photo interpretation

- Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study in line with the available literature and theoretical frameworks, as well as the strengths and limitations of this study

- Chapter 6 concludes this study with recommendations for clinical practice and education, social policies, and future research

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a critical review of literature addressing the perception and impact of active duty military personnel on emotional trauma. Background information about the topic will be first given and any gaps in literature, together with reasons for conducting this study will be identified. The theoretical frameworks guiding this research will then be discussed, followed by an overview of how relevant literature was identified. This literature will be then critically discussed in relation to the perceived impact of emotional trauma, the coping strategies adopted by first responders and the personal experiences of first responders following exposure to trauma.

2.2 Background to the Topic

Prevalence to emotional trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is on the increase, becoming a worrying public health concern. Risk factors contributing to emotional trauma within the military include sexual assaults, serious injury, violent attacks, witnessing dead bodies and terrorist attacks. Although trauma is closely associated with combat and war, the most common forms of trauma worldwide are not related to combat (Purtle, 2016). All communities and cultures are susceptible to some form of post-traumatic stress, making trauma a universal challenge, which goes beyond its conception within the military.

The difference in rates and types of emotional trauma between females and males has been widely documented (Boyd et al., 2013; Brownstone et al., 2018; Burgess et al., 2013; Carlson et al., 2013; Koo et al., 2016). Males reportedly experience emotional trauma following injury or witnessing death, whereas in females this is more of a sexual nature (Maguen et al., 2012). Such gender role difference accounts to the masculine role that the military culture enforces, or as van Gilder (2019) calls it, the "masculine warrior". Indeed, PTSD is the most common mental health condition in males, whereas in females, it is the second most common (Koo et al., 2016).

Emotional trauma commonly goes undiagnosed within the military, and its outcomes manifest themselves after retirement (Dalton et al., 2018). Notwithstanding, emotional trauma accentuates other mental health conditions, and it is usually these conditions that are accounted for. Studies have found correlations between trauma and depression, substance misuse, eating disorders and suicidal intent (Engel, 2013; Ginzburg et al., 2010; Jakupcak et al., 2009; Keane, 2015), as well as dysfunctional relationships (Coll et al., 2011).

The consequences of emotional trauma go beyond the affected individual. In a study conducted by Beck et al. (2018), spouses reported a decrease in relationship satisfaction with increasing scores of PTSD symptomatology. Similarly, Bakhurst et al. (2018) found a correlation between trauma and relationship quality, implying that trauma predicts more negative self-talk, more destructive communication in the form of criticism and disagreements and an increased likelihood to engage in hostile and conflicting behaviour. Furthermore, this study proposes that relationship satisfaction is dependant upon the partner's perception and readiness to adapt to the changing needs of

their partner. This suggests that emotional trauma demands adjustments in an already established relationship.

According to Coll et al. (2011) and Jones and Milroy (2016), most military personnel refuse to disclose and seek professional help. The military culture accounts mainly for this reluctance, which still considers psychological aide as a sign of weakness and cowardice, at times resulting in failed career advancement and breaching of confidential information (Coll et al., 2011; Pols & Oak, 2007). The emphasis that the military places upon toughness and resilience causes concern with regards to the military's perception upon mental health.

Despite being well-known that emotional trauma causes much distress, most international research has been conducted quantitatively, targeting the prevalence of mental health conditions associated with military populations involved in war and combat. There have been few studies, both quantitative and qualitative, targeting military personnel not involved in combat (Miyaoka, 2013). Such roles seem to be unaccounted for when thinking of the military, but are on the increase in various countries worldwide (Douvillier et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2011).

Locally, no statistical data can be found with regards to prevalence of mental health conditions, particularly trauma, within the military. Moreover, only the study by Micallef-Grimaud (2016) examined the effects of traumatic experiences and resilience factors within said population. This study, however, lacked to give a vaster picture of how military personnel experience their job and how this can alter their personal and professional lives. In view of this, the present study aims to address this gap in the local literature, through the conduction of a qualitative study aimed at exploring how active

military personnel interpret traumatic experiences and how these events affect their personal and professional lives. Information from this study will hopefully yield important evidence regarding the interpretation of trauma and establish ways of providing support that would best suit the military culture.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks will be utilised in this study, namely Antonovsky's Salutogenic Model of Health (SMH) and Connell's hegemonic masculinity framework. These theoretical frameworks will be discussed in the following section.

2.3.1 Salutogenic Model of Health Theory

The development of the SMH changed the way healthcare professionals and the whole healthcare system look at health and disease. Antonovsky's interest in the study of health's origins and the relationship between health, stress and illness arose after a study he conducted amongst women who had survived the concentration camps, which resulted in 29% of participants remaining emotionally healthy (Vinje & Bull, 2017). Antonovsky set out to explore why some individuals cope successfully with stress, whereas others do not and suggested to focus more on what constitutes good health and well-being.

Antonovsky started focusing on the origins of health, rather than on the pathogenic conditions that make a person ill. His main idea was to adopt a concept, whereby health is seen as a dynamic movement along a continuum of pain and suffering, called the ease/dis-ease continuum. This continuum is based upon four dimensions, namely the individual's subjective experience of pain, how functionally limiting the pain

is, whether the condition has any prognostic consequences and whether any medical treatment is required (Mittelmark & Bull, 2013).

According to the SMH, stress is ubiquitous and people are constantly exposed to stressful situations (Hyatt-Burkhart & Owens, 2016). Response to these stressors depends upon the individual's ability to make use of the resources available, the capacity to create, maintain and improve health and the ability to focus on problem solving. Antonovsky hypothesised that stress management occurs through the use of generalised resistance resources (GRR). GRR are genetic and environmental factors, such as physical, cognitive, relational, and socio-cultural factors, of either the individual or the community as a whole, that are effective in tackling different life stressors (Langeland et al., 2007; Taylor, 2004).

Apart from the GRR, Antonovsky also created the concept of sense of coherence (SOC), which comprises three main components: comprehensibility, or the extent that an individual perceives events to be clear, structured and consistent; manageability, or the degree that an individual feels that the resources available are sufficient to cope with the event; meaningfulness, the degree that a person feels that life is worth investing in and that these events are seen as challenges, rather than burdens (Griffiths et al., 2011; Langeland et al., 2007; Lindstrom & Eriksson, 2005). SOC and GRR are highly interdependent, with the development of SOC relying on the consistent and proper use of the GRR available.

According to Vinje and Bull's (2017) account of SMH, the focus of this model ought to be on the interaction between health-promoting factors and everyday stressors. The ultimate aim of Antonovsky's SMH is for an individual to learn how to make use of

salutory factors, with the intent of moving towards the ease end of the continuum. A simplified version of salutogenesis can be found in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Simplified Version of Salutogenesis (Erikkson, 2017, p.93)
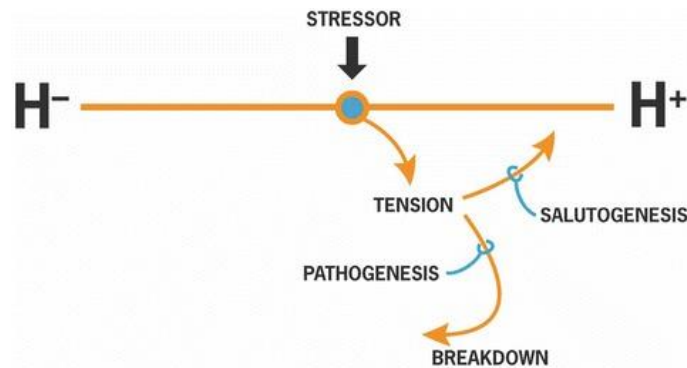
2.3.2 Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Framework

Raewyn Connell developed hegemonic masculinity way back in 1985, at a time when researchers were aiming to theorise the concept of power. Connell challenged the sex-role theories, which were predominant at that era, to give a new perspective surrounding the concept of male domination, whereby females were generally considered as subordinates of males (Demetriou, 2001; Wedgwood, 2009). Connell suggested that gender is socially constructed and susceptible to change, rather than a set role (Connell, 2012).

Connell argues that the expression of gender is dependent upon the interaction of human actions and social constituents through which humans depict themselves as being either male or female (Connell, 2012; Demetriou, 2001). Masculinity and gender evolve with changing cultural and societal values and norms, and differ with people's individual

definition of masculinity. Hence, there is no fixed meaning of what defines masculinity (O'Brien et al., 2005).

Despite this, Connell acknowledged that a hierarchy exists between genders, with hegemonic males being at the top of such hierarchy. The term *hegemony* refers to a set of values, which men in power inflict, to create a hierarchy whereby males are usually dominant over females, homosexual individuals and marginalised men (Connell, 2016; Hinojosa, 2010; Jewkes et al., 2015). This hierarchy depicts hegemonic males as being powerful, autonomous and in control of institutionalised power.

According to O'Brien et al. (2005), signs and symptoms of illness are regarded as a sign of weakness within this framework, resulting in reluctance to seek medical or psychological help. Being able to sustain injury, being strong and being able to not voice such injuries, were regarded as traits of masculinity amongst this study's participants. Similarly, Creighton and Oliffe (2010) argue that hegemonic masculinity views healthy men as being autonomous, robust and independent, rather than concerned with health and illness.

In his account, van Gilder (2019) reports that the military enforces the concept of masculinity. Male recruits are trained to use toughness and power to demonstrate their manhood. Up to this day, females and individuals within the LGBTIQ community are considered as the weaker sex within the military, and are often given roles that do not involve direct operational work. The military views these individuals as a threat to its effectiveness, highlighting that they bring forth incompetent feminine characteristics. Within this context, the masculinity framework leaves much to be desired with respect

to mental health, help-seeking behaviour and particularly, the interpretation of emotional trauma (Fox & Pease, 2012).

2.4 The Search Strategy

In order to conduct this critical review, an extensive literature search was carried out in six electronic databases accessed through the University of Malta online library, that is, Hydra Data Initiative (HyDI), selected on the basis that they provide relevant data in the health sciences field. The databases selected were Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) (EBSCO), Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (EBSCO), MEDLINE Complete (EBSCO), PsycINFO (EBSCO) and PubMed. A thorough literature search was also conducted in the search engine Google Scholar to avail of literature that was not available in full-text in the other databases. Moreover, literature identified in the articles as significant for the critical review was accounted for. This thorough search was purposely conducted to assure saturation of data, reduce search bias and maximise the number of applicable studies (Randolph, 2009). Primary sources of information were the main choice of data, providing a direct source of information pertinent to the research question.

The search was conducted between September 2019 and December 2019. All sources had to be published in the English language, this being the researcher's second national language. This could have led to language bias, as studies conducted in languages other than English could have been missed. Furthermore, the literature search was limited to published studies, excluding any grey literature or unpublished material. This could have also created bias, in that significant data could have been reported in

unpublished studies. Also, the search was limited to studies published between 2009 and 2019, in order to obtain the latest literature possible that could provide useful insight into the situation being studied (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

After identifying the databases to be used for the literature search, inclusion and exclusion criteria for the studies were set up. These will be discussed next.

2.4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The aim of this critical review was to scrutinise relevant literature exploring the perception of emotional trauma, its effects amongst military personnel, and the coping strategies adopted to manage the impact of emotional trauma.

The PEO (Population, Exposure, Outcome) framework was used to formulate the research question and identify the key search terms used. A pilot search was conducted between August 2018 and August 2019, during which it was observed that studies concerning military personnel carrying out SAR operations were limited. For this reason, the search was broadened to include other occupations who conduct such operations. Table 2.1 describes the inclusion and exclusion criteria developed for each constituent of the PEO framework.

Table 2.1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Developed for this Critical Review

PEO constituents	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population **(Personnel involved in SAR operations)**	Males first responders/ rescue workers and male military personnel, aged 18 years and over, carrying out work related to SAR operations and non-combat activities	• Studies whose participants had only been involved in combat operations, such as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, as aspects of trauma related to combat varies from that in SAR operations. • Studies which included female participants only, as female personnel tend to be less involved in operational tasks.
Exposure **(Situations that may result in emotional trauma)**	Studies, whose participants had been exposed to events or situations, which placed them at an elevated risk of experiencing emotional trauma, or even PTSD	• Studies were excluded if they included participants who had been exposed to sexual trauma or who had been previously diagnosed with a mental health condition, including substance misuse, as the resultant findings may also account to the impact caused by these conditions. • Studies were also excluded if the event to which they were exposed was unlikely to ever occur locally, as this makes results much more difficult to compare to the local scenario.
Outcome **(Emotional trauma)**	Aspects related to the perception and effects of emotional trauma and coping strategies employed	• Studies that did not report perception, effects and coping as an outcome or that portrayed only prevalence rates

A set of key terms were then identified, as depicted in the next section.

2.4.2 Search Tools and Search Strategy

The key terms used represent the various constituents of the PEO framework, and can be found in table 2.2. Truncation was also used, so as to include studies that used variations in the terminology of some key terms.

Table 2.2

Keywords and Synonyms Used

PEO Method	Population	Exposure	Outcome
Search term	Soldier(s), military personnel, military, first responder(s), search and rescue, military first responder(s)	Emotional trauma, emotional stress, psychological trauma, critical incidents	Perception, attitude(s), opinion(s), coping, experience, effect(s)
Search term for exclusion criteria		Sexual trauma, combat, war	
Truncation	Military*, search and rescue*		Perception*, cop*, experience*

After identifying the main key terms, their synonyms and truncations, these were put together using the Boolean Logic Operators 'AND', 'OR' and 'NOT', to create the search strategy for the identified databases. Furthermore, quotation marks were used at the beginning and end of some phrases, with the intention of looking for terms in the exact same order as the phrase. Each search resulted in a vast number of articles, following which various filters were applied to reduce the search results to a convenient amount.

A limitation of this literature review is the fact that the researcher conducted the literature search and critical appraisal on her own. This could have resulted in a higher

probability of error as the researcher did not have any peers with whom to consult upon the suitability of the selected articles. That said, the search strategy and literature appraisal were later reviewed by the research supervisor.

The search strategy used for each database, including the date when the search was conducted and the number of articles retrieved from each respective search can be found in Appendix A.

The search yielded a total of 1862 potential studies. The studies' relevance was examined as described in the next section.

2.4.3 Selection of Studies

The PRISMA guidelines as depicted by Moher et al. (2009) were used to aide in the selection of studies. Figure 2.2 gives an overview of how the resulting studies were chosen.

Figure 2.2

Flow Diagram depicting Study Selection and Excluded Articles, modelled after Moher et al. (2009)
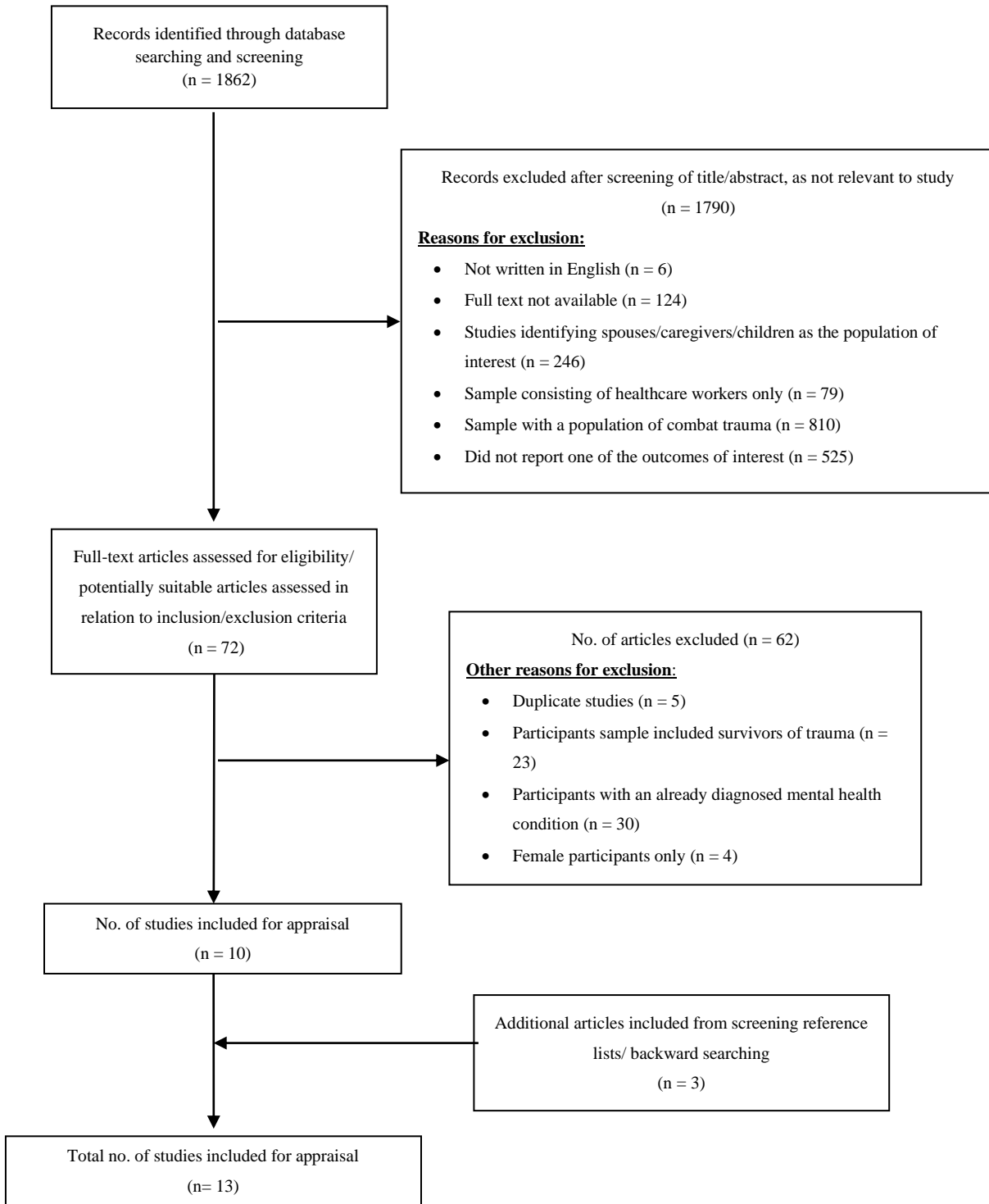
As figure 2.2 shows, a total of 13 studies were finally included for appraisal. The articles eligible for appraisal were both qualitative (n = 2) and quantitative (n = 11) in nature, exploring the:

- reported impact of exposure to traumatic experiences (n = 8)

- coping strategies most employed by first responders (n = 3)

- personal experiences of first responders following exposure to emotional trauma (n = 2)

The identified studies were conducted in various countries, mainly Australia (n = 3), United States (US) (n = 5), China (n = 1), United Kingdom (UK) (n = 1), Sweden (n = 2) and Ireland (n = 1).

Only the qualitative studies have taken into account the experiences and perceptions of first responders in relation to trauma. Moreover, during the literature search, no studies aiming to understand living with emotional trauma could be identified. This gap in the literature indicates that it is worth investigating how military personnel perceive emotional trauma and how this perception impacts their lives and affects their coping strategies.

The following section gives an overview of how the selected studies were appraised.

2.4.4 Study Appraisal and Data Extraction Tools

The identified studies were critically assessed for their quality. Xiao and Watson (2019) describe quality assessment as a means of examining the internal validity of a study, through an in-depth analysis of the data collection method, data analysis, results

and conclusions, by means of checklists. The identified studies were appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tools.

CASP tools are a set of checklists developed to effectively and systematically assess the relevance, trustworthiness and the results of the chosen studies (Nadelson & Nadelson, 2014). Different checklists were used, depending upon the research design of the study at hand, namely the CASP tools for systematic reviews, qualitative studies and cohort studies. These checklists assess for both internal and external bias and consider selection bias, allocation bias, confounding factors, any possible blinding factors, data collection methods, attrition bias (dropouts from the study) and value of the whole research.

In the following section, a descriptive overview and critical appraisal of the identified studies will be provided.

2.5 Critique of Relevant Literature

The critical evaluation of the identified studies will be discussed in three sections, as follows.

2.5.1 The Reported Impact of Exposure to Traumatic Experiences

Eight studies were identified as reporting the perceived impact of exposure to trauma (Berger et al., 2012; Carey et al., 2013; Harvey et al., 2016; Jones & Milroy, 2016; Kaufmann et al., 2013; Milligan-Saville et al., 2018; Schwarzer et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011). Whereas seven studies adopted either a cross-sectional design (n = 5) or a longitudinal design (n = 2), Berger et al. (2012) adopted a meta-analysis approach. Moreover, one notes that in their study, Carey et al. (2013) set out to investigate both the

impact of trauma and the coping strategies adopted thereafter. Hence, this study will be discussed in relation to both this theme and the next, which deals with the coping mechanisms adopted by first responders.

It is worth noting that only two of the identified studies (Kaufmann et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2011) were conducted amongst military personnel. Other studies were conducted with police officers (n = 1), firefighters (n = 2), SAR divers (n = 1) or a combination of one or more of these (n = 2).

Table 2.3 gives an overview of these studies.

Table 2.3

Overview of Studies reporting the Perceived Impact upon Exposure to Traumatic Events

Author(s)/ Year/ Country	Purpose of study	Study design	Sample size and response rate	Data collection method	Main findings
Schwarzer, Cone, Li & Bowler (2016) US	-To study whether exposure levels affect the course of symptoms seven years following the 9/11 events; -To examine whether history of symptoms from 2003/4 and 2010/11 is related to the differences in emotional support reported at wave 3 of data collection	Longitudinal study Sample was assessed at three different points over a nine-year period, using the data collection methods described	Purposive sampling 2204 police officers who worked at least one shift between 11th September, 2001 and 30th June, 2002 at the World Trade Centre or were involved in the transportation of debris between the towers after the attack. Participants had to not be diagnosed with PTSD prior to the 9/11 events. Authors do not mention the number of police officers primarily involved in this event, and therefore, no response rate was calculated.	*Stress response*: PTSD Checklist (PCL-Civilian Version), a 17-item self-report instrument, marked on a 5-point Likert scale. Internal validity was measured, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.95 *Exposure levels*: Scoring of five events, which the participants either reported to witness or not. Tool was tested and found to have acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha 0.78) *Emotional support*: Sum of	• Exposure to the 9/11 events was positively related to PTSD symptoms • The presence of PTSD symptoms was negatively related to emotional support ($r = -0.38$), indicating that police officers who had an increase in symptomatology, were less likely to seek emotional support • The higher the exposure to traumatic events, the higher the reported levels of stress, but not to severity of symptoms • Severity of symptoms was more related with factors that affect the coping styles of the individual

				three items that were selected from the Modified Social Support Survey. Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Good internal consistency was measured (Cronbach's alpha 0.89)	
Harvey et al. (2016) Australia	-To examine the prevalence of PTSD, depression and alcohol abuse amongst retired and current fire-fighters and to examine this relationship with cumulative trauma exposure	Quantitative, cross-sectional design	Purposive sampling 753 retired and current fire-fighters took part in this study. A response rate of 84% was achieved with current fire-fighters (n = 274), whereas 25.1% of retired fire-fighters responded to the study (n = 256). 223 participants were recruited online. All fire-fighters had to be working fulltime, thus, data from volunteer fire-fighters was eliminated.	*PTSD*: PTSD DSM-IV Criterion A questionnaire, self-reporting tool answering yes/no to given items; items 17-38 of Post-traumatic diagnostic scale (PTDS), self-reporting scoring tool on a 4-point scale. *Depression*: Symptom Checklist Core Depression Scale (SCL-CD$_6$), self-reported on a 4-point scale. *Hazardous Alcohol Consumption*: Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Consumption (AUDIT-C), calculating the number of days per week that an alcohol drink was consumed with the number of drinks	• Moderate symptoms of PTSD and depression emerged as 13% and 11% respectively, in the total sample of both current and retired fire-fighters • 24% of the whole sample reported to engaging in alcohol misuse • Retired fire-fighters reported significantly higher rates of probable PTSD and depression (OR = 2.61; CI (95%) = 1.47-4.64; p = 0.001 and OR = 4.31; CI (95%) = 2.27-8.22; p = <0.001 respectively) • Retired fire-fighters reported higher probability of being affected by alcohol misuse or any other mental disorder • Poor subjective

				consumed daily	wellbeing was reported to increase with an increase in alcohol misuse (up to 11%) and an occurrence in mental disorders (up to 72%)
				Poor subjective wellbeing: Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), self-measure on a 7-point scale.	• Co-morbidities exist between symptoms of PTSD, depression and alcohol abuse
				Reliability and validity of these tools was mentioned, but no values were given.	• Participants who attended to 21 fatal accidents or more reported a significant higher chance of suffering from probable PTSD (OR = 3.82; CI (95%) = 1.81-8.05; p = <0.01) and depression (OR = 2.62; CI (95%) = 1.26-5.46; p = 0.01), but not from alcohol misuse
Milligan-Saville et al. (2018) Australia	-To examine the effect of the frequency and accumulation of exposure to trauma on the development of PTSD and psychological distress;	Quantitative, cross-sectional design	Purposive sampling 423 fire-fighters took part in this study, with a response rate of 92.2% of the originally identified sample size. All were recruited from the New South Wales rural Fire Services and included both full-time and volunteer	*Trauma exposure*: Researcher designed self-reporting questionnaire, indicating number of attended distressing accidents per year. No validity and reliability reported *PTSD*: Abbreviated 4-item	• The reported occurrence of probable PTSD and psychological distress was 5.4% and 9.8% respectively, and 11.8% from any other probable mental disorder • Participants who had attended to 10 or more distressing incidents had a significant chance of

			version of PCL-5, self-reported on a 5-point scale. This tool is highly correlated with its full version and shows comparable diagnostic utility (Price et al., 2016)	suffering from probable PTSD (OR =6.39; CI (95%) = 1.73-23.6; p =0.005), and a lesser, but still significant chance of any other mental disorder (OR = 3.88: CI (95%) = 1.23-12.2; p = 0.02) and psychological distress (OR = 3.35; CI (95%) = 0.98-11.4; p = 0.05)
-To investigate whether particular critical incidents' characteristics increase the risk of developing mental disorders		fire-fighters	*Psychological distress*: 6-item Kessler Psychological distress Scale (K6), self-reported on a 5-point scale. Tool was previously validated (Kessler et al., 2010)	• The most common incidents involve deceased individuals (59.8%) and burnt or seriously injured adults (59.9%). Whilst seriously injured adults were significantly associated with developing a mental disorder (OR = 2.27; CI (95%) = 1.12-4.57; p = 0.022), being involved with a dead person was not (OR = 1.60; CI (95%) = 0.82-3.11; p = 0.169)
Jones, Nagel, McSweeney & Curran (2018)	-To investigate the mental health profile of first responders, risk factors that can contribute to such	Quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive study	Convenience sampling 220 first responders were recruited from across Arkansas, of which 86%	*Possible mental health problems*: General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28), self-scoring on a Likert scale of 0-0-1-1	• 14% of participants reported moderate-severe and severe depressive symptoms, 28% reported moderate-severe to severe anxiety, 25% reported

| US | problems, and their associations | | completed the whole survey, whereas 14% completed only sections of it. Of the whole sample, 67.4% were fire-fighters (n = 147), 44% were emergency medics (n = 96), 40.4% were certified emergency medics/ paramedics (n = 80), 5.5% were retired fire-fighters (n = 12) and 2.3% were retired emergency medics/paramedics (n =5). | *Depression*: Patient Health questionnaire (PHQ-9), self-reporting the occurrence of nine symptoms during the past two weeks and the difficulty these had on normal daily functioning

Anxiety: Generalised Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7), scored similarly to the PHQ-9

PTSD: PCL-C, self-report tool measuring scores on a 5-point scale

Alcohol consumption: AUDIT, 10-item self-report tool, scoring on a scale from 0 to 4

Quality and pattern of sleep: Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI), 7-item self-reporting scale, measuring frequency of various | significant symptoms of PTSD, 20% reported harmful/hazardous alcohol use, 10.6% indicated alcohol dependence, 93% reported sleep disturbances and more than 33% showed high risk of suicidality
• Department setting (rural vs. urban) and shift structure (12 vs. 24 hours) show high significant associations with the majority of variables assessed, mostly mental health problems, symptoms of depression, symptoms of PTSD and suicidality |

				components of sleep *Suicidality*: Suicide-Behaviours Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R), 4-item, self-reporting scale, measuring frequency of suicidality over a 12-month period, threat for attempt and future risk Validity and reliability of all scales were accounted for in a separate table.	
Kaufmann, Rutkow, Spira & Mojtabai (2013) US	-To study the prevalence of psychiatric disorders between various occupations -To investigate the association between exposure to trauma and the development of mood, anxiety and alcohol use disorders	Longitudinal study Data collected at two points: T1 between 2001 - 2002, and T2 between 2004 - 2005	Convenience sampling 43093 participants were recruited at T1, 34653 were eligible for T2. Respondents had to be 18 years of age and older, not physically or mentally impaired, were on active duty in the military, and were not deported or deceased between T1 and T2. Response rates at T1 and T2 were 81% and 87% respectively.	*Assessment of mental and substance-use disorders*: Alcohol Use Disorder and Associated Disabilities Interview Schedule (AUDADIS-IV), a self-report measure of lifetime and recent presence of mood, anxiety, substance misuse and Axis II personality disorders. Validity and reliability of tool was previously accounted for (Hasin et al.,	• Alcohol abuse and dependence and depressive episodes were most frequently reported amongst PSW at both T1 and T2 • PSWs did not differ significantly from other occupations in lifetime prevalence and 12-month prevalence in mood, anxiety, and alcohol-use disorders • PSW are more likely than other occupations to

			At T1, 26979 participants were employed, of which 474 were in protective services (PSW) and 26505 in other occupations	1997; Ruan et al., 2008) *Exposure to potentially traumatic events*: 6-event scale, to which the participants self-reported lifetime exposure and recent exposure (occurring between T1 and T2). Validity and reliability of such scale were not accounted for.	unexpectedly see a dead person (AOR = 2.80; CI (95%) = 2.25-3.50; p = < 0.001), to be physically attacked, injured or beaten (AOR = 2.03; CI (95%) = 1.49-2.78; p = <0.001) and to be held up, mugged or threatened with a weapon (AOR = 1.84; CI (95%) = 1.38-2.46; p = <0.001) • Odds of developing a mental illness increase with increasing exposure to traumatic events, especially in the early days of PSW career, with a 2.30 times higher chance of developing a mood disorder, 2.44 chance of developing a substance-related disorder and 6.93 chance of developing PTSD • PSW who were on the job at both T1 and T2 reported no statistically significant chances of developing any mental disorder • Odds of suffering from anxiety disorders following retirement increase by 3.75

					times.
Wang et al. (2011) China	-To determine the variables in the Asian culture that might increase risk of PTSD	Quantitative, exploratory cross-sectional study	Purposive sampling 1056 soldiers from one of the 16 battalions deployed at the earthquake area were eligible for this study. Participants were excluded if they had previous history of traumatic experience.	*Exposure to stressor*: Earthquake Experience Scale (EES) was developed, based upon the deployment risk and resiliency inventory. This is an 8-item tool, self-scored on a 5-point scale. Reliability and validity not reported for this tool. *PTSD*: The Chinese version of the Davidson Trauma Scale (DTS-C), a 17-item scale, assessing frequency and severity of trauma-related symptoms; self-scored to assess severity and frequency. This tool was previously validated by Chen et al. (2001), and showed good internal validity (Cronbach's alpha = 0.97) and test-retest reliability (r=0.88)	• 6.5% (n = 69) of subjects were classified as screening positive for PTSD, of whom 94.2% met DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for PTSD • Participants that were screened positive for PTSD showed higher scores on the EES (t-test = 16.725; p = <0.001). PTSD also appears to increase through being a lonely child, growing up with one parent and being dissatisfied with the current service • Risk of PTSD also increased in cases where no psychological support was offered during the mission (chi-square value = 9.56; p = 0.002), in participants who tested positive for drinking (chi-square value = 4.91; p = 0.027) and participants who screened positive for smoking (chi square value = 7.69; p = <0.01)

Berger et al. (2012) US	-To calculate the pooled worldwide occurrence of PTSD amongst rescue workers -To determine the methodological, sociodemographic, work and trauma-related variables that explain the large variability in occurrence rates	Systematic review	Articles were searched in the ISI Web of Science, PubMed and PILOTS databases. Studies had to have prevalence rates of PTSD amongst ambulance workers, canine handlers, fire-fighters, rescue workers and police officers involved in a search and rescue operation. Backward search, as well as grey literature were accounted for. 29 studies were finally eligible for meta-analysis	Meta-analysis was carried out, using Q statistics to test for homogeneity, and I^2 statistics for heterogeneity. Heterogeneity was then assessed through meta-regression models. Variables for such models were selected following resulting p values <0.10 of univariate analysis of each variable	• Rescue workers have a high worldwide prevalence for PTSD (10%), but being a heterogeneous group, several factors influence such prevalence rates • Statistics reveal that rescue workers living in Asia and North America have higher prevalence estimates than those in Europe ($\beta = 1.04$, p = 0.01). • Ambulance personnel also reported higher estimates when compared to fire-fighters or police officers ($\beta = -0.90$; p = 0.04 and $\beta = -1.29$; p = 0.03 respectively)
Carey, Gallagher & Greiner (2013) Ireland	-To determine whether Irish SAR divers, previously exposed to traumatic experiences, were at a greater risk of developing PTSD symptoms, when compared to divers without such	Quantitative, cross-sectional design	Purposive sampling All active Irish SAR divers (n = 260) were invited to participate, of which 155 responded, giving a response rate of 75%. No particular inclusion criteria were put forth	*Exposure to stressor:* Impact of Event Scale revised (IES-R), a 22-item self-measured tool addressing intrusion, avoidance and hyper-arousal symptoms, measured on a 5-point scale. Cronbach's alpha was accounted for and scored 0.88 for intrusion, 0.85 for avoidance and 0.79	• Divers who had not yet witnessed traumatic experiences were at a greater risk of developing symptoms of PTSD. Significant were symptoms for intrusion, suggesting that intense and prolonged psychological distress, as well as intrusive memories and dreams prevail the most

				for hyper-arousal	• Cumulative trauma was not significant in increasing PTSD symptomatology
	-To establish the coping factors used by SAR divers			*Coping*: Amended Coping Factor questionnaire, self-reported on a 3-point scale, assessing the usefulness of various coping mechanisms. Validation of tool was reported, but no statistical measurements were provided	• SAR training, support from colleagues and sense of duty were most commonly reported as coping factors

N.B.:.CI = Confidence Interval; OR = Odds Ratio; AOR = Adjusted Odds Ratio; β = Beta coefficient; p = p-value; PTSD = Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Results from the study by Berger et al. (2012) depict that ambulance and emergency workers have a higher risk of developing PTSD than other first responders. This high prevalence is associated with the repeated, daily exposure of ambulance and emergency workers, to experiences outside the norm of human involvement, including daily exposure to human suffering, death and grief (Jonsson et al., 2003). That said, these results do not imply that fire-fighters and police officers are not prone to developing PTSD, but rather that these two professions do not frequently experience trauma. When they do, it is usually because of a major disaster. Hence, the reduced prevalence of PTSD symptomatology.

In the study by Jones et al. (2018), 25% of participants indicated significant symptoms of PTSD, however, the results are not differentiated between the various first responders. Moreover, they suggest that higher ranks are associated with a decreased risk of symptomatology when compared to lower ranks. This was accentuated especially between the ranks of captain and fire-fighters, with an OR = 0.236 and p = <0.01. However, 25% of participants having significant symptoms of PTSD did not have their ranks specified. Hence, one cannot conclude that having a high rank poses fewer threats to mental illness.

Of significance in the study by Berger et al. (2012) was the elimination of research conducted amongst military personnel, reasoning that their duties are more directed towards combat and war, rather than towards SAR. This contrasts with other studies (Disaster response: The role of a humanitarian military, 2011; Wang et al., 2011), who have recognised the military's role in SAR. Moreover, Berger et al. (2012) did not include studies whereby police officers were involved in duties other than SAR.

This could have also led to bias, since psychological distress can be caused by factors other than SAR, such as the responsibility of carrying a firearm. Hence, one can conclude that this study's results cannot be generalised to the entire SAR occupations.

The longitudinal study by Schwarzer et al. (2016) conveys that police officers involved in the rescue operations following the 9/11 World Trade Centre events report increasing levels of stress symptoms on the PCL checklist, over a nine-year period. These results imply that the higher and the longer the duration of such exposure, the higher the perceived stress levels. Such outcome was also highlighted by Harvey et al. (2016), claiming that the risk of mental disorders increases with accumulation of trauma. Conversely, the studies by Carey et al. (2013) and Milligan-Saville et al. (2018) depicted that cumulative trauma was not statistically significant to PTSD symptomatology. It is worth noting that stress levels were deemed to be most severe during the second round of data collection, which was only revealed in a growth curve model. Data collected at both waves 1 and 2 of the study were lacking, limiting the readers to results of wave 3 only. Consequently, data collection and analysis related to reported demographic characteristics and stress levels could not be scrutinised. Efforts made to obtain the data collected at waves 1 and 2 were unsuccessful. Furthermore, the resulting effects upon police officers with previous diagnosis of PTSD were not taken into consideration, failing to examine how the stress levels of these individuals proceeded upon involvement with such a dramatic event.

Studies by Harvey et al. (2016) and Milligan-Saville et al. (2018) depict a significant probability of PTSD symptomatology following exposure to 21 or more and 10 or more traumatic events respectively. Unlike Milligan-Saville et al. (2018), Harvey

et al. (2016) included retired fire-fighters in their sample pool. Although the response rate amongst retired fire-fighters was small (25.1% vs. 84% of current fire-fighters), the results shed light on the tough reality of the trajectory of various mental illnesses. In fact, results show a significant increase in difference in odds ratio between current and retired fire-fighters for PTSD and other mental disorders, as well as an overall decrease in wellbeing. Contrarywise, Kaufmann et al. (2013) report that prevalence estimates between current and retired personnel remains similar. However, one must note that data depicting such estimates was not provided and there was only an increase with regards to new-onset anxiety disorders (AOR = 3.75), which was statistically insignificant (p = 0.048). Although the study by Kaufmann et al. (2013) was longitudinal in nature, a considerable number of participants were lost to follow-up, making it difficult to reach justifiable conclusions.

In the study by Wang et al. (2011), 6.5% (n = 69) of the participants were screened positive for PTSD, of which 65 met DSM-IV criteria for PTSD. Although low, the authors note that this rate is comparable with that of previous studies. Conversely, several factors could have contributed to this rate, mainly the small sample size. A total of 16 battalions were involved in the SAR operations following the earthquake, however, only one was included in their study. Furthermore, the researchers do not state how many soldiers constitute each battalion, leaving readers blind as to the response rate at full participation. Also, as in the study by Schwarzer et al. (2016), participants with previous traumas or previous diagnosis of PTSD were not included, prohibiting the researchers to study the cumulative effect of such a natural disaster.

Studies reporting prevalent comorbidity between PTSD, depression and alcohol misuse were various (Harvey et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2013), with the latter giving lifetime prevalence rates of 15% and 37% respectively. Moreover, Harvey et al. (2016) noticed a significant increase in alcohol consumption and depressive symptoms with an increase in the number of traumatic events attended to. Alcohol consumption is considered by many as a means of coping behaviour, which, however, can have detrimental effects on occupational functioning (Skogen et al., 2009). The increase in depressive symptoms can be attributed to the lack of support perceived by many (Wang et al., 2011).

High levels of moderate to severe anxiety (28%) and disturbed sleeping patterns (93%) were accounted for by Jones et al. (2018), who attributed the latter as a risk factor posed by the long working hours. An increased risk of anxiety disorders was also accounted for by Kaufmann et al. (2013). It is worth noting that in their study, Jones et al. (2018) did not assess the correlation between anxiety and sleep. Thus, one cannot conclude whether anxiety can result from lack of sleep or whether disturbed sleep is a consequence of anxiety.

Interestingly, Carey et al. (2013) and Kaufmann et al. (2013) suggested that symptoms of PTSD tend to be more common amongst newly recruited personnel, without previous SAR experience. Explanations for this outcome include reluctance by newly-recruited individuals to seek support and a wear-off effect with experienced personnel, who become used to the traumatic situations encountered on their job. Although the results of Carey et al. (2013) were analysed on a small number of newly-

recruited divers (n = 25), the same cannot be accounted for the study by Kaufmann et al. (2013), who had a sample size of 282 individuals.

Some limitations of most of these studies include their cross-sectional design and the measuring tools used. Despite assessing perceived symptoms, self-report tools cannot be used to give clinical estimates of mental illness diagnosis. Moreover, participants tend to under-report prevailing symptoms, believing that this might affect their career. This method of data collection attributed towards bias, as the participants' responses could have been based on what they considered would be most viable for the research. Moreover, the use of cross-sectional designs limited researchers to study solely what was evident at that point in time, hence failing to examine the trajectory of such symptoms and any factors that might improve or degenerate said symptoms. Lastly, the findings listed in table 2.3 pertain to a heterogeneous sample, falling within the remits of first responders. The lack of research amongst military first responders also poses a gap in the literature which ought to be addressed.

The next section focuses on the coping mechanisms that first responders adopt to help with the impact of emotional trauma.

2.5.2 Coping Strategies Adopted by First Responders

Three studies depicted the coping mechanisms employed by first responders in coping with trauma (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Brooks et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2017). The study by Brooks et al. (2015) is a systematic review, the others adopting a longitudinal design (Morgan et al., 2017) and a cross-sectional design (Arble & Arnetz, 2017). The study by Carey et al. (2013), as described in table 2.3, will also be incorporated in this theme.

It is worth noting that only the participants in the study by Morgan et al. (2017) were soldiers, the majority of whom (57%) had never been deployed to war. Conversely, Arble and Arnetz (2017) involved first responders with various occupations, including soldiers, police officers, coast guards, fire department and emergency medical services. Likewise, Brooks et al. (2015) included studies conducted amongst professions regarded as offering humanitarian aide, including police officers, soldiers, recovery workers, firefighters, human rights workers and health professionals.

Table 2.4 gives an overview of the above mentioned studies.

Table 2.4

Studies Portraying the Coping Mechanisms Employed by First Responders

Author(s)/ Year/ Country	Purpose of study	Study design	Sample size and response rate	Data collection method	Main findings
Brooks et al. (2015) UK	-To identify risk and resilience factors that can predict psychological outcomes -To identify recommendations for interventions, in order to foster resilience in disaster relief workers	Systematic review	Articles were searched in the following databases: MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO and Web of Science. Studies were included if they were written in English, were published in peer-reviewed journals and reported factors that determined psychological outcomes in humanitarian aid workers or similar occupations 61 studies were finally included in the review	Studies were appraised to check for their quality. Each study was scored individually and scores were presented in table format. Quality of quantitative studies scored a median of 85.7%, whereas qualitative studies scored 76.4% Thematic analysis was used to analyse data	• Need for appropriate training to equip all relief workers with the skills, knowledge and confidence to work under challenging conditions. Also, train individuals to work in a team • Length of exposure, type of exposure, professional boundaries, perceived poor support, lack of cooperation, unclear roles and tasks, demands of the job, inadequate equipment, guilt and self-doubt and the adoption of negative and positive coping strategies all have an impact upon mental health • Formal support, especially Trauma Risk Management, was considered as helpful

				• Coverage by the media post-deployment was perceived as stressful and trigger for disaster recall • Personal and professional growth following the incident being inversely related to PTSD
Morgan, Hourani & Tueller (2017) US	-To investigate whether relationship between coping behaviours and mental health symptoms replicate at both baseline and follow-up and to test the magnitude of each -To investigate the association of each variable with itself from baseline to follow-up -To verify the nature of baseline mental health for later coping behaviours and baseline coping behaviours for later mental health symptoms	Longitudinal study Data collected at baseline (T1) and 18 months after (T2)	Convenience sampling 889 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne platoon were originally surveyed at baseline. The researchers make no note as to how many soldiers actually make up this platoon and give no percentage as to how many participated. 263 soldiers responded to the follow-up session Analysis was conducted upon data collected from only the 263 soldiers, who participated at both	*Perceived stress*: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), 10-item self-reporting scale, scored on a 5-point scale. Good internal consistency noted, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86) *Depression*: Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), a 20-ite self-reporting scale, scored on a 4-point scale. Good internal validity noted (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90) *Anxiety*: 7 Patient Health Questionnaire, self-scored on a 3-point scale. Good internal consistency noted (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85)	• Most frequently reported coping strategies reported at baseline were thinking of a plan to solve the issue (41.6%), talking to a friend (37.6%), engaging in a hobby (36.6%), and playing sports (33.2%), with the least being smoking marijuana and using illicit drugs (0.5%), and thinking about hurting self (0.8%). Same results were obtained for follow-up with slightly different percentage reporting • Adaptive strategies such as talking to a friend and exercising were associated with less perceived anxiety, stress and depression, whereas maladaptive strategies such as making use of illicit drugs were associated with higher depressive symptoms.

			baseline and follow-up		
	-To assess the effect of each coping behaviour at baseline on each set of mental health symptoms at follow-up			*Coping strategies*: 10-question tool, self-assessed on a 4-point scale. Internal validity was calculated as weak for this tool, measuring α = 0.64 for adaptive coping strategies and α = 0.38 for maladaptive coping mechanisms	• Drinking was the variable most associated with stress, self-harm and depression • Symptoms of depression remained stable over time, as well as the coping behaviours endorsed • Perceived symptoms of depression at T1 were associated with talking to a friend less and exercising less at T2 • Baseline perceived stress predicted decreased likelihood of engaging in a hobby, whereas playing sports at baseline was correlated to less stress at T2
Arble & Arnetz (2017) Sweden	-To identify approach and avoidance coping strategies -To examine the correlation between avoidance and approach coping strategies and well-being -To investigate the role	Quantitative, cross-sectional design	Convenience sampling 6240 first responders were invited to participate, of whom 3656 responded (59% response rate). 43% were soldiers, 24% were police. The authors make no note as to how the other 33% were distributed amongst the	A survey was constructed for the purpose of this study, based upon previous focus group interviews with first responders. The resulting survey contained items related to exposure to stress, well-being, social support, coping styles, substance misuse, physical health and post-traumatic growth. The survey was self-scored on a 10-point scale. All items	• Approach coping behaviours were related to better overall well-being, whereas avoidance coping was related to a decrease in wellbeing • Exposure to stress was related to a decrease in approach coping and social support and an increase in physical health behaviours • Social support and

	of social support in well-being		other professions	achieved values for Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 or higher	approach coping appear to lead to post-traumatic growth
	-To investigate the role of physical health in well-being				• Avoidant coping strategies are directly related to a decrease in wellbeing, which can lead to an increase in substance misuse • Avoidance coping may at times lead to post-traumatic growth, through the avoidance of negative effects posited by certain situations

N.B.: α = Cronbach's alpha

Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Arble and Arnetz, 2017) describe coping as a complex process that aims to address life's stressors and diminish the psychological and emotional consequences thereof. Coping strategies can be denoted as either approach or avoidance (Fauerbach et al., 2009). Approach strategies include mechanisms that challenge degrading patterns of thought and behaviour, whereas avoidance strategies include mechanisms by which feelings triggered by a stressor are avoided.

In their study, Arble and Arnetz (2017) revealed that individuals who are exposed to stressful events can engage in both approach and avoidance strategies, with the latter being more prominent. Particularly, the researchers note a decrease in tendency to seek social support. This implies that the negative emotions and thoughts arising from the traumatic experience become too difficult to cope with. These negative patterns of reinforcements have been observed in many individuals suffering from PTSD, with Arble and Arnetz (2017) claiming that until these patterns are adequately dealt with, the likelihood of engaging in avoidance strategies will prevail. This series of associations has been widely acknowledged to have detrimental effects on wellbeing (Arble et al., 2018; Skogen et al., 2009), especially within the occupational field. Conversely, this study depicts an increase in exercise and sleep, with increased exposure to trauma. These strategies have also been regarded as avoidance strategies, in that these alienate individuals exposed to trauma from dealing with its consequences. This suggests that some strategies can be regarded as both approach and avoidance strategies, depending upon the context (Arble et al., 2018).

Both approach and avoidance coping mechanisms have been associated with post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG has been described as a process, whereby traumatic

experiences set a new perspective and outlook on life, leading to better psychological wellbeing (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). One can easily identify how approach strategies lead to PTG. Conversely, Arble and Arnetz (2017) strongly suggest that avoidance strategies can be utilised to aide a person with recovery, through avoiding stressful situations for a period long enough to offer recuperation. The benefits of using such strategies are being widely recognised for general wellbeing (Flannery, 2015).

Morgan et al. (2017) found similar results with regards to social support amongst soldier participants. Social support as a means of coping was described by Brooks et al. (2015) as conflicting in nature, with results being both favourable and against social support. Those in favour regarded it as a means of psychological wellbeing. Conversely, some studies found that support could act as a stress factor, especially due to miscommunication and excessive worry from relatives. Alternatively, support from colleagues was regarded as highly effective, as portrayed by Carey et al. (2013), whose participants regarded it as valuable in coping with trauma. This suggests that SAR personnel feel more at ease expressing themselves with individuals who have experienced trauma themselves and who can acknowledge their distress. Moreover, lack of appropriate support or delayed support can instill feelings of guilt, shame and self-blame, rendering individuals more susceptible to adopting avoidant strategies.

Unlike the study by Arble and Arnetz (2017), Morgan et al. (2017) found a surprisingly negative link between stress or depression and exercise, with participants reporting that the higher the stress levels or symptoms of depression, the less likely they were to engage in sports. This discrepancy, however, could be due to the varying sample size employed by these studies, as can be observed in table 2.4.

Moreover, Arble and Arnetz (2017) indicated that those who engaged in one or more adaptive strategies, such as thinking of a plan, talking to a friend and engaging in a hobby or sports, exhibited lower levels of perceived stress and depression at follow-up. Conversely, maladaptive coping styles, like alcohol misuse, self-harm and smoking increased this likelihood. One must also note the correlation that exists between several coping styles and mental health. Engaging in adaptive mechanisms leads to better mental health, whereas mental distress becomes prominent when maladaptive strategies are used.

Brooks et al. (2015) highlighted several themes indicating the factors that could have an impact upon coping, particularly the importance to appropriately train individuals in their line of duty to be emotionally and mentally ready for the job's hardships. Emotional preparedness has been associated with an increase in resilience factors and appropriate response strategies. SAR training was highlighted by Carey et al. (2013) as being an imperative way of dealing with the effects of trauma, implying that knowing beforehand how to deal with a situation can induce positive mental wellbeing. Conversely, avoidance strategies such as emotional distancing and suppression of feelings were regarded in various studies included in this review. Brooks et al. (2015) posit that such strategies can be predictive of PTSD, thus recommending acceptance and management of emotions as an alternative strategy. Formal support would be valuable in this regard. Conclusively, factors leading to the adoption of either approach or avoidant strategies have not been studied in the identified literature.

Notwithstanding, the studies' limitations need to be considered. Firstly, all studies used self-reported measures to assess the variables of interest. It has been

previously discussed that the use of subjective measures may result in the under-reporting of variables. Moreover, one cannot but note the sample size in the studies by Arble and Arnetz (2017), Carey et al. (2013) and Morgan et al. (2017). Despite having a response rate of 75%, the sample size in the study by Carey et al. (2013) was very small (n = 155), whereas the response rates in the studies by Arble and Arnetz (2017) and Morgan et al. (2017) were 59% and 30% respectively. These estimates suggest that the findings cannot be generalised to a wider population. Moreover, even with regards to coping, there was a dearth of literature conducted amongst military first responders.

In the next section, two studies will be discussed in relation to the first responders' personal experiences following exposure to emotional trauma.

2.5.3 Personal Experiences of First Responders following Exposure to Emotional Trauma

Two studies were identified as depicting the personal experiences of first responders after exposure to traumatic events (Backteman-Erlanson et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2017). These qualitative studies adopted a narrative design and a grounded theory approach respectively. Only the study by Walker et al. (2017) was carried out amongst soldiers, some of whom were involved in combat and suffered from traumatic brain injury (TBI). They also argue that they suffered from "psychological health conditions" (p. 4), however give no details pertaining to this. In contrast, Backteman-Erlanson et al. (2011) conducted their study amongst police officers.

Table 2.5 gives an overview of these studies.

Table 2.5

Overview of Studies depicting the Personal Experiences of First Responders following Exposure to Trauma

Author/ Year/ Country	Purpose of study	Study design	Sample size and response rate	Data collection	Main findings
Backteman-Erlanson, Jacobsson, Oster, & Brulin (2011) Sweden	-To describe the experiences of male police officers when caring for victims of motor vehicle accidents	Qualitative approach, narrative design	Convenience sampling Nine male police officers were involved in this study. Each officer had to be responsible for patrolling, have experienced injured or deceased people in motor vehicle accidents, and be able to speak and understand Swedish. All officers had undergone two years of police education, which is obligatory in Sweden Researchers make no note as to how many officers were approached originally, but only refer to the nine participants who accepted to take part	Narrative, face-to-face interviews were conducted, six in September 2003 and three in January 2008. Each interview lasted between 30-34 minutes. Participants were asked to narrate and reflect upon their experiences when dealing with injured or deceased individuals in traffic accidents. An interview guide with probing questions was formerly prepared, and the interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed	Emergent themes: • Being secure within the support system; developed various strategies • Being confident about previous successful actions; knowing own capacity and doing what is necessary • Being burdened with uncertainty over what should have been done; feelings of inadequacy

Walker, Kaimal, Gonzaga, Myers-Coffman, & DeGraba (2017) US	-To highlight the different emotions and experiences of living with PTSD and traumatic brain injury (TBI) through the analysis of mask-making in art therapy sessions	Grounded theory	Convenience sampling 370 soldiers admitted at the National Intrepid Centre of Excellence took part in this study. All had combat-related TBI and other psychological health conditions. All participants were members of the branches of the army.	The art therapist was involved in taking notes of the participants' descriptions of what each mask symbolized, together with their experiences with creating the mask. The image of each mask, as well as the clinical notes were uploaded on an electronic medical records documentation system, which was available for the perusal of the researchers. Demographic data of each participant was available on such system. Consent was previously attained from all 370 participants	Emergent themes: • Physical and psychological injuries and challenges • Recognising support and mourning loss • Military and community identity • Cultural metaphors and existential reflections • Mask as a life story, questions, transitions • Conflicted/ split sense of self

N.B.: TBI = Traumatic Brain Injury

Backteman-Erlanson et al. (2011) set out to explore the experiences of male police officers when caring for victims who have been either seriously injured or deceased during a traffic accident. This study was deemed applicable to this review on the basis that even the operational squadrons within the local military have to deal with injured and deceased individuals. A dominant theme in this study portrayed the strategies that have been adopted by police officers, to attain a sense of security. Emotional detachment and compartmentalisation of the problem were two problem-solving strategies that helped them cope. The matter of emotional detachment has also been previously supported as a coping style in the systematic review by Brooks et al. (2015). Through compartmentalisation, the participants reported trying to avoid any work-related problems when not in uniform, in so doing, trying to solve any job-related emotional turbulences. This also enabled differentiation between their professional and personal lives.

Planning and mental preparedness were considered vital in experiencing mastery and control over a situation. Their sense of security was also attained through a sound support system from the organisation itself. Officers reported a sense of comradeship and feeling more at ease discussing the events' happenings with their colleagues, rather than with their relatives, a matter that was previously sustained by Carey et al. (2013). Research suggested that this is due to the professional growth generated through the narration of events between first responders themselves (Elmqvist et al., 2010). Participants elaborated on this matter further and argued that not all colleagues are open to such discussion, implying that at times, they have to keep their experiences and turmoils to themselves.

Numerous feelings were regarded by Backteman-Erlanson et al. (2011) as being dependant upon their performance during the traumatic situations. Knowing

own capabilities instilled confidence in police officers, as this often led them to achieve successful results. In contrast, feelings of uncertainty and doubt were prominent when knowledge and support were deemed as lacking or when there was insufficient time for them to mentally prepare for the event ahead. Such situations often led them to not knowing how to act in the presence of other people's emotional reactions. Furthermore, several participants reported ruminating on what they could have carried out differently, despite knowing that they could not have done anything else.

The utilisation of art therapy in the study by Walker et al. (2017) was considered as pivotal in the expression of various emotions, which often go unexpressed in words. The programme, from which participants were recruited, asked soldiers to convey their feelings through the creation of masks, allowing for an increased tolerance of trauma-related feelings, as well as improving insight into the emotions that are either repressed or have remain unprocessed (Lobban, 2014). Several themes emerged following analysis of each mask, particularly the psychological and physical injuries of trauma. Soldiers created masks with sealed or stitched lips to express that they were struggling to verbally express themselves. Others utilised dull colours to communicate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Participants also portrayed the loss of relationships, both marital and peer, indicating that the frequent exposure to traumatic events heavily effected personal relationships. The military identity was also depicted, especially in association with their military branch, signifying a sense of pride and belongingness to the military. Of significance was the theme whereby a broken or divided sense of self was portrayed. Such masks were frequently divided into two opposite and conflicting images, insinuating the calm and tranquil person most commonly portrayed to the

community and the internal emotional turmoils endured daily. Walker et al. (2017) reports how this split sense of self has also been examined in previous studies.

Despite being two very valuable studies, one cannot but note the heterogeneity of the sample population taken into account. Whereas one study utilises police officers, the other focuses more on soldiers who might have undergone TBI.

A dearth in literature was observed with regards to how trauma is perceived and expressed and how it impacts these individuals within society. Such studies would be most valuable, especially for professionals working within this field, willing to offer more contemporary and individual-based support. This study aims, thus, towards addressing this gap, by exploring the perceptions and impact of emotional trauma within a population of local military soldiers, with more than five years of experience.

2.5.4 Ethical Considerations

Noteworthy in literature utilised for the critique are the ethical approaches used by the researchers. All studies except two (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Kaufmann et al., 2013) make reference to how ethical approval was granted and by whom. Arble and Arnetz (2017) point out that the study was carried out after several discussions and collaborations with relevant entities, however, make no mention as to what was discussed during these meetings and who gave permission for the study's commencement. Furthermore, it was noted that only the studies by Jones et al. (2018) and Wang et al. (2011) made reference to the provision of psychological support for the participants. Wang et al. (2011) noted that nearly half of their cohort made use of at least one support session. There were two systematic reviews in this

critique (Berger et al., 2012; Brooks et al., 2015), which required no previous ethical approval. The qualitative studies by Backteman-Erlanson et al. (2011) and Walker et al. (2017) note that informed consent was previously obtained from the participants, whereas the quantitative studies automatically attained consent through survey response. Conclusively, all studies maintained confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, particularly the qualitative studies, which utilised pseudonyms to conceal the true identity of the participants.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature review demonstrated that studies concerning the perception and impact of emotional trauma by military SAR workers are sparse. This was revealed through having to incorporate studies comprising other occupations, regarded as first responders, in the literature review. Furthermore, the majority of studies were quantitative and cross-sectional in nature, giving no comprehensive overview of what it means to live with emotional trauma.

The literature review highlights that the effects of emotional trauma are varied, ranging from emotional burdens to mood and behavioural alterations. Several coping strategies are adopted by SAR workers, in an attempt to deal effectively with such turmoil. The fact that only a few studies focused on the coping mechanisms and the lived experiences of rescue workers indicates that more research is needed in this regard. It is hoped that through this study, a gap in the literature is addressed and that through the exploration and evaluation of the soldiers' experiences, new information will be generated, with the aim of improving the soldiers' health, as well as providing the necessary information for healthcare professionals in the development of sound support systems.

The following chapter will discuss details pertaining to the methodology employed in this research, particularly the research design, selection of participants, data collection method and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter portrays details related to the planning stage of this study. It presents the main research questions and gives details concerning the research methodology used. Reasons for choosing a case study design will be outlined. Moreover, this chapter will give details as to the aims and objectives, the operational definitions and the theoretical background of the study. It will also include details about data collection methods, data analysis, methodological rigour, ethical considerations and issues related to personal reflections.

3.2 Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The aim of this study was to explore how active soldiers interpret traumatic events, and how these events, in turn, affect their coping capabilities. The main research questions were:

- *How do active soldiers interpret traumatic experiences?*

- *How do these experiences affect their coping capabilities?*

In order to achieve this, the following objectives were identified:

1. Enhance understanding of and increase awareness with regards to how military personnel perceive traumatic experiences, in relation to the military culture

2. Explore ways in which the soldiers' personal and professional lives have changed after experiencing these events

3.3 Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the term *emotional trauma* refers to the subjective interpretation of traumatic events and the psychological effects witnessed thereby, causing intense emotional disturbances (Solomon & Heide, 1999).

Furthermore, an *active soldier* refers to a member of the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM), who performs duties related to the local military role.

The following section gives details about the paradigm upon which this work is based.

3.4 Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are regarded as a set of philosophical underpinnings, or constructions, created by researchers to categorize beliefs and values and guide research (Guba, 1990). Also referred to as "lenses", paradigms are imperative in viewing and interpreting issues related to a particular discipline (Weaver & Olson, 2006). Guba (1990) asserts that paradigms are characterised by three questions, referring to the *ontology* (What is the nature of reality?), *epistemology* (How can we come to know about it?) and *methodology* (Through what means can we acquire knowledge?) of the research paradigm.

The following section will give details pertaining to the research paradigm used in this study.

3.4.1 Positivism, Constructivism and Realism

According to Wainwright (1997), nursing, in itself encompassing human and social philosophies, can be considered as being composed of the positivist, constructivist and realist paradigms.

The ontology of the positivist worldview declares that the events we experience exist in the real world. Through using quantitative approaches and scientific methods, theories are verified or falsified. Nonetheless, this approach fails to satisfy the needs of nursing researchers, as positivism fails to understand the underlying causes of an affirmation (Creswell, 2014a), hence disregarding how people shape their interpretations of the world around them.

Constructivism holds that through interpretation of experiences, individuals are constantly learning how to construct a representation of reality (Cobern, 1993; Palladino, 2005). The person forms a subjective understanding to something (Peck & Mummery, 2018; Walker, 2015), aiding in the creation of an identity within the culture of a particular community or larger society. This paradigm takes on a qualitative approach, whereby hermeneutics and dialectics become the ultimate means through which concepts can be drawn and refined (Guba, 1990).

Realism identifies that a world exists independently of theories and perceptions and recognises that it can be seen from different individual perspectives. Individuals define experiences differently, in order to relate to the world through the development of new knowledge and concepts (Maxwell, 2012). Similar to constructivism, realism tries to get an understanding of how people cope. Conversely, realism tries to identify the underlying causes resulting in final perceptions and behaviours (Easton, 2010; Roberts, 2014). Whereas constructivism only gives importance to the lived experiences, realism further considers the underlying mechanisms that compel individuals to acknowledge their experiences as they do (Pilgrim, 2014). Although realism does not totally reject empirical methods for research, realists prefer to take on qualitative approaches.

3.4.2 Choosing between Different Paradigms

A realist approach was preferred for this study, primarily because it takes into consideration the origins of emotional trauma, which can result from various occurrences, as described in chapter 1, and can be perceived differently by different individuals.

Moreover, realism distinguishes between what is "real" and what is "observable". Realists believe that only through an understanding of what we can observe, can we arrive to a comprehension of the real world. In the case of this study, that which can be observed by active duty soldiers, such as traumatic experiences, leads to what they perceive as being real. My own perceptions of what trauma must mean to active duty soldiers was challenged throughout the course of this study, as I came to the realisation that my understanding of trauma differs greatly from theirs. This goes hand-in-hand with the principles of realism, in that our own perceptions are built upon what we experience.

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. Realism also holds that various methods of information or data collection can be utilised to help bring such an understanding to the fore. The next section will provide information as to the research design used and rationales into the methods employed.

3.5 Research Design and Rationale for Chosen Method

The following section will give an overview of the qualitative designs most commonly used. The rationale for choosing a case study design will also be depicted.

3.5.1 Choosing between Different Qualitative Methods

Qualitative approaches allow researchers to study human experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the causes influencing these experiences. Gelling (2015) affirms that qualitative approaches are dynamic and multidirectional in nature, allowing for the interaction between researcher and participant. Creswell (2014a) and Gelling (2015) further argue that qualitative approaches are based on a central question, which seeks to uncover new meaning. Some of the research designs used in qualitative approaches include grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative design and case study.

Grounded theory deals with the generation of new, emergent theories, seeking to discover behaviours generated by individuals in an attempt to solve an identified concern (Howlett, 2013; Polit & Beck, 2010a). Ethnography seeks to understand the culture of a specific community, through the immersion of the researcher within that culture for an extended period of time (Creswell, 2014a; Gelling, 2015). Phenomenology deals with studying the "lived experiences" and perceptions of human subjects surrounding a particular phenomenon, after having experienced that phenomenon at first-hand (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2010a). Narrative designs offer insight into the experiences of participants through the narrating of stories (Creswell, 2014a; Polit & Beck, 2010a).

3.5.2 Case Study Design

A case study design was considered the most appropriate approach to use. Cope (2015) accentuated that case studies investigate one phenomenon, or case, in a real-world context. As Luck et al. (2006) indicate, the case in a case study design is the object that holds the most interest, meaning that the case does not refer to the

process of how the study is to be conducted, but to the single phenomenon upon which the study's enquiry is based. In this study, emotional trauma is the topic of interest, and therefore, can be referred to as the case. Yin (2018) further articulates that this design is suitable when a "how" or "why" research question needs to answered, when a contemporary event needs to be studied, and when the researcher has little or no control over this event.

The case in itself has boundaries of its own. Boundaries, including time, events and geographical locations, can limit data collection. One can suggest that emotional trauma is bound by time, events and location, in that one needs to primarily experience or witness a traumatic event for it to develop. Moreover, emotional trauma develops over time, and an unaccounted for accumulation of trauma can lead to a more severe form of stress, commonly identified as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Also, not all active soldiers tend to develop emotional trauma. Factors playing a role in the development of trauma were not discussed, as they were not the main areas of interest in this study.

A case study design allows the researchers to gain various perspectives as developed by different individuals, helping the researcher come to an understanding of why individuals think and behave the way they do (Polit & Beck, 2010a). Perspectives can be gathered through either a single-case or a multiple-case study design. A multiple-case study approach was chosen for this study, as it provides greater certainty over the study's findings and increase generalisability (Cope, 2015; Yin, 2018). Generalisability in case study designs differs from generalisability as termed in quantitative research. In quantitative research, generalisability refers to the extent that the selected sample is representative of the whole population of interest. Conversely, generalisability in case study designs refers to the confirmatory

strategies that focus on the credibility of the findings, with the intent of providing insightful and inductive generalisations about the case being studied (Polit & Beck, 2010b). Yin (2018) argues that by using a multiple-case study design, cases can be replicated, leading to the emergence of similar or contrasting results, thus increasing the robustness of the study.

Having no specific ontological, epistemological and methodological positions (Luck et al., 2006; Rosenberg & Yates, 2007; Yin, 2008), case study designs allow for the use of multiple data collection methods, depending on the research question that needs to be answered. For the purpose of this study, two different types of data collection methods were used, namely open-ended, semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation. The use of these techniques will be discussed in the following sections.

3.6 Sampling Technique and Recruitment

In order to give deeper meaning and value to each individual interview, a small sample size was employed (Robinson, 2014). Since varying views exist as to the most appropriate sample size, it was decided that this would depend upon saturation of data, with the minimum number of participants required being six. By using the method of data saturation, the researcher stops recruiting participants and collecting data when new data is no longer evident.

Consequently, through data saturation, a purposive, non-random sample of ten participants was recruited. The sample used was homogenous in nature, meaning that participants had common characteristics that yielded richer information to the research questions. Robinson (2014) identifies five different means of homogeneity, of which psychological homogeneity was identified as being the common underlying

characteristic. This refers to the "similarity within a sample imparted when participants are selected based on the possession of a particular trait or ability" (Robinson, 2014, p.28). For the purpose of this research, all participants had to work within a section of the AFM, whereby the possibility of suffering from emotional trauma was deemed high. Thus, participants were recruited from three operational units, namely the Ammo and Explosive Squadron, Maritime Squadron and Airwing Squadron.

Participants were recruited through three different intermediaries, one for each squadron, chosen by the Commander himself, and were informed, through a letter, of the aims and objectives of this study. Candidates had to meet the following inclusion criteria:

i) adult males, being 18 years of age and older

ii) having had at least five years working experience within the field.

Due to the small number of female active soldiers within the local military, females were excluded from this study, to avoid identification. When the participants were identified, the researcher met with them, explained the nature of the study and provided them with an information letter. During these meetings, the participants were given the opportunity to express their concerns and have their queries answered. These meetings also allowed for the building of trust and served as an eye-opener into the nature of their work. Some expressed difficulties in participating, mainly due to the volatile nature of the job, as well as frustration towards the order given by the intermediary to participate. One must duly note that due to the military culture, when potential recruits were approached, they were done so on a command order, meaning that they could not refuse to participate.

Following these meetings, a time and date for the interview were arranged. It was also agreed with the participants that photographs had to be sent to the researcher on the contact details provided, ideally prior to the interview. In some cases, the participants chose to print out the photographs themselves and bring them on the day of the interview. Before commencing the interview, the participants signed a consent form and their rights were duly explained.

The following section will give additional details of the participants.

3.7 Demographic Details of the Participants

The participants of this study were all Maltese, male citizens with over five years experience working within any one operational squadron. In total, ten participants were recruited for this study. At the time of the study, the working experience ranged from seven years up to 23 years, with a mean average of 16.82 years. Moreover, participants ranked differently within the AFM, from bombardier, considered as a low rank, to staff sergeant, which ranks higher. Details pertaining to the participants can be found in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 lists the number of years each participant has been working within the squadron. Due to confidentiality matters, the names that appear in the table are pseudonyms. To further protect the participants' identities, ranking orders and the squadrons within which each participant works have been eliminated from the table.

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

<u>Name</u>	<u>Number of years working within the respective squadron</u>
Matthew	10
Alan	13
Martin	23
Simon	20
Terrence	23
Joseph	12
Christopher	7
Raymond	20
Vince	11
Michael	23

The following section will give details pertaining to data collection and the research setting.

3.8 Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, audio-recorded semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation were utilised for data collection. Yin (2018) reports that four other methods of data collection can be utilised in a case study design, which will be outlined in table 3.2. Reasons for not utilising these methods will also be portrayed.

Table 3.2

Methods of Data Collection for Case Study Designs

Methods of data collection	Reasons for unsuitability of sources
Documents	Documents, in the form of reports, diaries, letters and articles from newspapers were deemed unfit for this study. Documents tend to be biased in nature, as the person documenting the events might write a twisted version or a personal perspective of the events, or might be easily edited (Yin, 2018). Moreover, documents tend to be very difficult to retrieve, especially due to confidentiality matters. As a researcher, I was asked several times whether I needed to look into written reports related to specific events. It was made clear that even if this had to be part of my study, this would prove very difficult, since reports contain detailed information about all those involved
Archival records	Taking the form of a census or numerical data, these records would have given no information with regards to emotional trauma. Archival records would be ideal in cases where strategies or economies need to be studied and where the acquisition of such data would be pivotal in the planning and implementation of higher quality schemes (Rendon & Schneider, 2014).
Direct observation	Yin (2018) differentiates between two types of observations, that which can be done informally, and that which requires the use of an observational tool. Given that individuals suffering from emotional trauma may easily adapt to their group's behaviour and cannot be pinpointed from other individuals, observation was deemed unfeasible. Moreover, acting as an observer might have proven to be more of an obstacle than an aide for data collection, especially due to the unpredictability of the job
Participant observation	As Moelker (2014) pointed out, as a researcher using this source, one must be willing to "be on the move, and to undertake the journey him/herself" (p.106). As a researcher, I felt I would be more of an obstacle to their daily routine, especially during search and rescue operations. Moreover, it was felt that participants would be less willing to approach the researcher about the topic, when in the knowledge that other colleagues are aware about the research topic itself

Photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.8.1 Data Collection Methods

3.8.1.1 Photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation, the use of visual methods in qualitative research, is an innovative method of data collection that has been widely recognised and accepted within the fields of psychology, sociology and healthcare (Glaw et al., 2017; Pain, 2012). Photo-elicitation enhances the engagement process between participant and researcher, giving the participant the power to direct the interview to those issues reflected in the photos (Bates et al., 2017; Burton et al., 2017; Pain, 2012) and creating a more relaxed atmosphere, especially in cases where difficult topics need to be discussed. Processing visual imagery arouses deeper parts of the human brain, allowing for the generation of profound emotions and the expression of ideas that are difficult to articulate (Glaw et al., 2017). Additionally, Pain (2012) claims that a combination of visual and verbal communication helps to bridge the gap between the unknown and the known.

Photo-elicitation aides with the objectives of a case study design, as it captures rich data and reveals more information than verbal means of data collection (Glaw et al., 2017). Hence, it enhances and broadens the understanding of the participants' experiences, allowing researchers to gain more insight into their perception of real-world events (White & Drew, 2011). Bates et al. (2017) argue that visual imagery tends to challenge the researcher's assumptions about a topic, introduce new perspectives and may stimulate new paths of thinking (Pain, 2012; Papoulias, 2018). This argument was acknowledged deeply throughout the study, especially during the first few interviews. During this time, my perceptions of emotional trauma were greatly challenged and the photographs that were brought forward represented reflections, which altered my personal reasoning and thinking about trauma, for the duration of this work.

The use of photographic imagery was deemed to be an impeccable method in collecting data about trauma, which can be a heavy subject to discuss. Especially in the military, it may remain subconsciously hidden. Pain (2012) and Papoulias (2018) stated that photography can help express concepts that would have been previously suppressed. Considering the array of events soldiers experience throughout their career, it was considered more feasible to allow the participants choose themselves the events they perceive to have impacted them the most. Hence, participants were asked to capture a series of photographs representing both events that have left an impact upon them and any changes that these brought about. Furthermore, through discussing their own photos, the semi-structured interview remained participant-driven and created member checking, a technique used in qualitative research to ensure validation of data.

3.8.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews. Due to the flexible and non-rigid nature of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, Yin (2018) considers these to be the most appropriate types of interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to not only follow a planned sequence of questions, but also ask unplanned questions that elicit more information about topics or key arguments previously not thought of.

Moser and Korstjens (2018) articulate that the interview ought to follow a pattern similar to a dialogue or a conversation between researcher and participant. The focus needs to be on what is being said, with one question being adapted to lead onto the next. The use of prompts, probes and exploratory questions was highly regarded in encouraging participants to speak further. Questions encouraging the interpretation of photographs and storytelling, as suggested by Bugos et al. (2015), were considered pivotal in this study, and these took up much of the interview.

Being a novice researcher myself, an interview guide, consisting of eleven main open-ended questions (Appendix B), was developed to assist with the interview process. The questions were developed purposely for this study, after conducting a thorough literature search of the topic. The first few questions were purposely set to make the participants feel at ease and familiarise themselves with the interview process (McGrath et al., 2018). The interview, together with possible prompts and probes, was practised during the pilot phase of the study. Although the interview schedule was planned in both English and Maltese, all participants chose to conduct the interview in Maltese. Details pertaining to the pilot phase of the study and the actual study will be given in the next section.

3.8.2 Pilot Work and Actual Interviews

Before commencing the study, a pilot interview was conducted, allowing the researcher to familiarise herself with the interview process, the possible duration of interviews and any possible difficulties that might develop. Since the participant did not form part of the actual sample, the data gathered from this interview, which lasted 39 minutes, was not included for analysis. This ensured the elimination of data contamination. During the pilot interview, it was noted that some questions were difficult to follow and the possibility arose of participants turning up for the interview without any photographs. Hence, the interview schedule was slightly amended to include solutions for the identified problems. Furthermore, the pilot interview allowed me, as the researcher, to gain insight into my questioning style and into how and when to include probing.

Following the pilot phase of the study, the actual interviews were conducted. The interviews lasted between 32 and 112 minutes, with an average of 60.6 minutes.

All interviews were carried out face-to-face and were audio recorded. The recording allowed the researcher to later listen to these interviews, transcribe them and work upon certain issues, especially those related to the questioning style. Moreover, the recording allowed the researcher to focus on what was being said and reflected upon during the interview, rather than on jotting down notes whilst it being conducted.

Of the ten participants, only five provided the researcher with photographs. Several reasons were identified and these were mostly related to the unpredictable and volatile nature of their job. One of the participants reported that only a particular smell can remind him of distressing events, which he could not capture in a visual image. Furthermore, despite having five participants providing images addressing the events that have highly impacted various aspects of their life, only one of the participants provided images reflecting how emotional trauma has affected their life. These were, however, not included in the study report, as they were not captured by the participant himself.

Following the transcription of the interviews, it was felt that more information could have been obtained from some participants. However, a second round of interviews was avoided, on the grounds that some participants became highly emotional throughout the interview, whereas others preferred to talk more openly when the recording device was off.

The next section will describe where the data collection occurred.

3.8.3 Research Setting

Due to security and confidentiality matters brought up by the AFM, all the interviews were conducted within the squadrons' premises. The intermediaries were informed that the interviews had to be conducted in a quiet place, with minimal or no

distractions, as advised by Morse and Field (1996). Despite this, it was not always possible to be uninterrupted during the interviews and in fact, the audio-recording had to be paused once or several times. Most interruptions involved informing the interviewees about upcoming duties or emergencies. In one particular interview, the participant asked the researcher to move to another part of the room, as he felt being over-watched by his colleagues.

In the next section, the methods used for data analysis will be discussed.

3.9 Data Analysis

Through data analysis, a researcher can gain a better understanding of people's views and the meanings that they place upon different phenomena (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Yin (2018) hypothesised the use of five different models for data analysis, of which cross-case synthesis was deemed to be the most appropriate.

Cross-case synthesis allows the researcher to firstly analyse each case individually and identify "within-case patterns" (Yin, 2018, p.196). Afterwards, the researcher would compare each case and look for any similarities and differences in patterns. This model was utilised in analysing both the interview transcripts and photographs, if any, associated with each interview. Pink (2011) acknowledges that after analysing both methods of data collection separately, photographs and narratives need to be combined, in order for the photos to have meaning. Methods for separate data analysis and how these methods were amalgamated will be discussed next.

3.9.1 Thematic Analysis

In order to identify, analyse and report patterns emerging from the transcripts, the thematic analysis approach as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. This approach, which is considered highly suitable for novice researchers due to its flexibility, took a realist, inductive and latent stance in this study. Realist in the sense that the experiences and perceived realities of participants were reported; inductive, meaning that the themes which emerged from the data were not linked to any theoretical framework or preconceived ideas, but emerged from the data itself; latent, implying that the themes were not only described, but also interpreted during the analysis phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 3.3 depicts the steps followed to analyse the transcribed interviews. NVivo, a computer-assisted software, was also used to aide with the analysis of data and theme generation.

Table 3.3

Phases of Thematic Analysis Approach

Steps	Description
1. Familiarising self with data	The interviews were firstly transcribed in written form, in a manner that remained true to the original audio-recording. The transcripts were then read several times in an "active way" (Nowell et al., 2017, p.5), in order to immerse self into the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nonverbal behaviours, such as pauses, change in tone of voice and coughs were also accounted for, as these may be important for the interpretation of data. Notes were also taken in the reflective journal, whereby thoughts and personal perceptions were acknowledged.
2. Generation of initial codes	Codes were then generated from the identification of similar ideas that were of interest to this study. Boyatzis (1998) identified a code as "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (p.63). Different sections within the transcript were coded for different subjects, with some being coded in more than one subject. Since the interviews were carried out in Maltese, coding for data was done in Maltese, in an attempt to avoid losing

	any information in the translation process.
3. Looking for themes	Once several codes were identified, the codes were sorted and assembled into potential themes. Braun and Clarke (2019) argue that themes are "creative and interpretative stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves" (p.594). Thus, themes ought to provide a broader picture of the coded data. A thematic map was completed, which aided in sorting the different codes into various themes and subthemes, and in the identification of overarching themes.
4. Reviewing themes	Themes and their respective codes were then reviewed and refined, until the final themes reflected what was in the original data. Braun and Clarke (2006) posit that researchers can only move onto the next stage, once they have a good understanding of the different themes that emerged from the study, how they fit together and the overall narrative they tell about the data.
5. Defining and naming of themes	At this stage, the essence of each theme was identified, and the aspects of data within each theme that are of primary interest were determined. For each theme, a detailed analysis was provided, that discussed not only what that specific theme conveys, but also, how the theme related to the bigger concept of the study. Moreover, the way each theme related to the research question was also considered. By the end of the stage, the researcher was able to describe the scope and content of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, each theme was given a name that reflected that which the theme contained.
6. Write-up of report	During this final stage, the analysed data were compiled in a report, discussed, and interpreted. Excerpts from the original transcripts were included, in order to aide with the interpretation of the themes and to illustrate the complexity behind the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.9.2 Photographic Analysis

According to Pink (2011), photographic analysis entails the examination of the participants' subjective interpretation of the photograph itself. The subject of the photographs is based upon the individual's identity, culture and relationship to the subject at hand (Collier, 2004). Thus, photographs offer good representations of the participants' everyday life, what they value, and how they define their world. Through photo-elicitation, the participants were allowed to select the instances they wanted to discuss, interpret and categorise the photographs, hence offering the

researcher an explanation of what the photographs mean to themselves (Noland, 2006). Through this step, there was no need for the researcher to come up with own interpretations of photographs. The analytic approach by Oliffe et al. (2008) was used for photographic analysis. Table 3.4 illustrates the steps taken.

Table 3.4

Steps taken for Photographic Analysis

Steps	Description
1. Preview	The photographs were viewed separately, together with the related participants' narrative. Notes were written down to link each photograph to its respective narrative. This stage enabled the researcher to understand better the participants' understandings and interpretations of trauma (Oliffe et al., 2008).
2. Review	The photographs and their linked narratives were examined in depth, in order to pinpoint congruence and inconsistencies between what was said by the participant and what was depicted in the photographs. Analysis at this stage also involved the meaning given by the researcher herself, as based upon previous readings.
3. Cross-photo comparison	After analysing each photograph separately, the entire collection of photographs was compared, in order to develop categories that represent the meaning depicted in the photograph. The analysis and narrative behind each photograph were also taken into consideration when forming categories. Categories were formed through the grouping and regrouping of photographs, and similar to the coding system used in thematic analysis, some photographs were classified under more than one category.
4. Theorising	In this final stage, the categories were analysed in relation to the theoretical frameworks brought forward at the beginning of this study, in an attempt to base analytic decisions upon theoretically-informed study findings (Oliffe et al., 2008).

As was the case during thematic analysis, photographic analysis was carried out firstly within each case and then across all cases, ensuring that all the steps required for cross-case synthesis were performed. Following the separate analysis of

each data collection method, the themes and categories that emerged were grouped together through the notion of concepts. Thus, themes and categories suggesting similar views were grouped together and analysed further.

The next section will discuss how trustworthiness was maintained.

3.10 Trustworthiness of Data

In qualitative research, trustworthiness (rigour) refers to the validity and reliability of a research project. Validity may be defined as the extent to which two variables affect each other and the degree to which such a relationship can be generalised to other settings. Additionally, reliability makes reference to the extent at which replication of the study will yield the same results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Several researchers have argued against the conventional methods of positivist approaches in measuring trustworthiness in qualitative research (Healy & Chad, 2000; McGloin, 2008). Guba (1981) came up with a four-criteria model to be utilised when measuring trustworthiness, namely:

- Credibility or "truth value"

- Transferability

- Dependability

- Confirmability

These widely-accepted criteria will be adopted in this study. The following sections will discuss and apply the four criteria to this study.

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility, or truth value, deals with the confidence that a researcher places in the accuracy of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) put forward several

methods that aide in ascertaining credibility in qualitative research. Two of these methods were utilised:

3.10.1.1 Activities that Increase Credibility. A thorough literature search about emotional trauma and military culture was conducted prior to initiating data collection, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This ensured that knowledge of both concepts and how these are interconnected was acquired. On-site visits and preliminary meetings were also conducted, as suggested by Shenton (2004).

The use of triangulation, or multiple data collection methods, was also suggested. Yin (2018) posited that case studies are rated very highly as they produce "convergent lines of inquiry", meaning that findings are based upon several sources of evidence, each confirming and verifying the various viewpoints (Shenton, 2004). In this study, triangulation was carried out primarily through the use of semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation and the replication of the interview itself, and hence, the formulation of a multiple case-study design.

3.10.1.2 Peer Debriefing and Member Checking. The supervisor, acting as a peer in this study, provided the researcher with opportunities to question whether the findings have arisen from bias. Informal notes were taken after each peer meeting, to ensure that ideas generated during the meetings were not forgotten. Written records also provided evidence into the thought process of the researcher and supervisor.

Member checking was also performed, in that participants discussed the imagery themselves and the salient points of the interview were discussed with the participants after terminating the interview, thus providing immediate feedback (Shenton, 2004).

3.10.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or populations (McGloin, 2008; Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) reason that the researcher's job is not to ensure transferability of data, but rather, to provide sound information that enables readers to judge whether the findings can be generalised.

In disagreement with researchers who argue against the generalisation of findings in qualitative research, Yin (2018) maintains that since the purpose of a case study is to expand theories, then, this design is ideal in generalising findings. Particularly, through the use of a multiple case-study design to study a population from various sectors, all experiencing the same phenomenon. In this study, participants were recruited from three squadrons, deemed to have a higher probability of experiencing emotional trauma. Nonetheless, in examining transferability, readers need to be aware of the objectives behind the primary study, so as to relate its findings to another setting. The provision of sound background information, a clear idea of the context and case under study, and the provision of clear objectives and research questions, aides in the transferability of results.

3.10.3 Dependability

Dependability is concerned with whether the same results will be obtained if the study was to be replicated under the same circumstances at another time. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the link between dependability and credibility, emphasising that if credibility can be demonstrated, then, there is no need to further validate dependability. To further strengthen this argument, they argue that through using triangulation to determine credibility, dependability is then authenticated. Using

Lincoln and Guba's approach, one can assert that one way of achieving dependability in this study was through the use of semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation and a multiple case-study design.

Another technique suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and McGloin (2013) is that of an audit trail, whereby another researcher examines the way data was collected and analysed and scrutinises the results to confirm whether these are supported by the data at hand. In this study, the research supervisor acted as an auditor, in that it followed closely the way the study was conducted and helped the researcher generate and analyse the findings in detail.

3.10.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with the extent to which the findings are a result of the participants' narratives and are free from biases and any preconceived ideas (Yin, 2018). Three techniques have been put forward by Yin (2018) to validate confirmability, and another by Shenton (2004). Yin (2018) highlights that through triangulation, maintaining a chain of evidence and peer debriefing, confirmability can be validated.

Additionally, Shenton (2004) discusses the technique of reflexivity, whereby the researcher reflects in a critical manner on any presumptions and subjective perspectives made about the study in general. This technique has also been shown to be important in acknowledging the decisions made throughout the research and in favouring one approach over another. Reflexivity will be discussed in detail in the following section.

3.11 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, the process of becoming conscious of own thoughts, influences, ideologies, social constructions and becoming self-aware, is an important facet in qualitative research. Bishop and Shepherd (2011) and Finlay (2002a) make note of how our behaviours, personal assumptions, and agendas can impact the whole research process and the interpretation of results.

Finlay (2002a; 2002b) claims that reflexive analysis ought to be carried out right from the moment the research project is visualised, so as to acknowledge why there was a deep interest in that particular topic. When the idea of this study was conceptualised, I immediately started exploring personal reasons for conducting this study. By reading several forms of literature, I gained knowledge about the relationship that mental health and the military share, and the frequency that certain mental health traits occur within the military. Despite this, I tried to conduct the interviews with an open-mind, and tried to be cautious not to let any preconceived ideas affect the type of questions asked. Moreover, I noticed myself becoming more sensitive towards this topic, as initially I had not perceived the topic to cause such burden and distress. I also came to the realisation that despite all the literature I had read, I never felt completely prepared to understand the burden that emotional trauma causes.

In order to indulge in reflexive analysis, a reflective diary was adopted. I made sure to document my personal thoughts, reactions and feelings after each interview, as well as the way participants reacted during the interview and what was disclosed afterwards. The diary has helped me become more aware of my own limitations and what I had to improve upon. Moreover, it acted as an eye-opener to

the dynamics between the participants and myself. It allowed me to account for situations whereby I felt that the participants were uncomfortable disclosing further information about the topic. Nevertheless, none of the participants wanted to terminate the interview, probably because they felt this was their only chance to express themselves without being stigmatised.

The notion of prejudice arose after several participants asked me whether the interview would remain confidential. I never felt this was a matter of trust, more a matter of discrimination from the AFM itself, had certain issues become exposed. Through reflexivity, I also became aware that a rapport had been built with the participants who had attended the initial meeting, as opposed to those whom contact was initially made through a phone-call.

Finally, through this research, I came to the realisation that civilians have an inaccurate preconception of military personnel. I, myself, feel that I used to devalue their profession, however, through being within their premises and through meeting various military members, my perception and ideology towards these individuals have been greatly altered. Subsequently, I feel that I have become more aware of the necessity to have adequate psychological assistance, tailored to meet the military's needs, bestowed.

In the following section, ethical implications related to this study will be brought forward.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The commencement of this study transpired only after approval was granted by the Faculty Research and Ethics Committee (FREC) and the UREC board (Appendix C). Moreover, the study could not have been carried out without the

authorisation of the Commander of the AFM, whose approval was granted prior to applying for the FREC review board (Appendices D and E).

Polit and Beck (2010c) highlight the Belmont Report as being a fundamental document to refer to when considering ethical implications, taking into consideration protection from harm, respect for human dignity, and justice. The procedures related to these principles will be now discussed.

- Participants were primarily informed of the elements of this study through a meeting or phone-call, allowing them to ask questions and voice their concerns. They were also provided with an information letter, which gave further details about the study and depicted the benefits and risks involved (Appendix F).

- During the interview, it was noted that some participants were experiencing psychological distress. Psychological services, at no additional cost to the participants or researcher, was thus provided, as suggested by Ryan et al. (2007) (Appendix G).

- Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were informed about their rights to refrain from answering certain questions or withdraw from the study, without giving justification or being forced to engage further (Connelly, 2014). They were also informed that withdrawal from the study would result in having their already-collected data erased, thus giving the participants autonomy. Autonomy was also performed through asking the participants which images could be published in the report.

- The principle of respect for human dignity was maintained primarily through informed consent (Appendix H), which was obtained after detailed information about the study was given by the researcher. Thus, the aims of

the study, what was being requested and how the information was going to be used were all explained during the first encounter and again prior to the interview (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011), asserting that the participants have understood all the information and participation is based on such understanding.

- Confidentiality was maintained through the practice of pseudonymity. All transcripts, audio-recordings and photographs were assigned a code to protect the participants' identity, which were stored separately from the transcripts and other personal information. Moreover, all physical material was stored away in a locked cupboard, whereas coded audio-recordings, transcripts and photographs were stored on the researcher`s personal computer in an encrypted format. Participants were also informed that all audio-recordings and photographs will be destroyed following the termination of the study. Due to the limited number of individuals working within each squadron, it was important to ensure that the participants' identity could not be identified. Thus, limited demographic details of the participants were included in this report, and any personal and professional information was not made reference to.

- The intermediaries were chosen by the Commander himself and were informed about the study through a letter (Appendix I). Potential participants were then approached by the intermediaries, ensuring that the researcher came to no knowledge as to who was approached. Throughout the end of data collection, the researcher came to the knowledge that participation was imposed upon potential candidates, violating their free will.

- Participants were informed that due to confidentiality matters, photographs should ideally not capture any individuals (Bugos et al., 2014; Glaw et al., 2017). Then again, it was agreed, that if this is the case, the faces on all images will be blurred. Furthermore, participants were notified that all photographs need to be taken by themselves, and on an informal, day-to-day basis.

- The principle of justice was taken into consideration through the employment of participants from various squadrons and through the fair selection of participants. All participants were treated with respect, irrespective of their socioeconomic status or age, and were offered the same rights. Moreover, through the selection of three squadrons, the burden of sharing traumatic experiences was not made explicit to one particular squadron.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter provided details into the methodology used and how data was collected and analysed. It also gave an overview into the main research questions and the research paradigm utilised. Finally, issues with regards to the trustworthiness of data and ethical implications of this study were discussed. In the following chapter, the findings of this study will be portrayed.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

4.1 Introduction

Data gathered from active soldiers will be illustrated throughout this chapter. The findings aim at answering the main questions of this study, which focused upon the soldiers' interpretation of traumatic experiences and the changes that resulted as a consequence. The recommendations put forth by Yin (2018) were utilised to analyse data. Hence, a within-case analysis was first carried out. A cross-case synthesis was then conducted and its findings will be depicted as themes and superordinate themes.

The next section will provide a general overview of various facets of this chapter.

4.2 General Overview

As already discussed, ten male participants were recruited for this study. Their demographic details and pseudonyms were depicted in section 3.7. For the rest of this report, the participants will be referred to by their pseudonymised name, to maintain confidentiality. Throughout this chapter, a number of excerpts from the original transcripts are included, reflecting and providing evidence of the themes identified across the cases. Since all interviews were conducted in Maltese, the original Maltese version together with its corresponding translated English version will be presented. These excerpts are enclosed in quotation marks and italicised and

each is labelled with the participants' pseudonym, indicating which participant voiced each excerpt. Some text was omitted for editorial purposes, and this is represented by an ellipsis, i.e. "…". Furthermore, instances where other individuals or significant landmarks are referenced are denoted with an X, whereas comments added for clarification purposes are enclosed in brackets. Imagery taken by participants is also included and will be referred to using the participants' pseudonyms.

Details pertaining to the within-case analysis will be portrayed in the next section.

4.3 Within-Case Analysis

This section deals with the separate analysis of each individual case, however, due to word limit, the full report of each separate analysis is presented in Appendix J. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the emergent themes that arose following analysis. Thematic excerpts, representative of the themes' main ideas, are also presented.

Table 4.1

Emergent Themes from Within-Case Analysis

Case	Emergent themes	Thematic excerpt
Matthew	Personal struggles	*"Biss pero' trid tiġġildilha l-biċċa ee… ġlieda enormi, erm. Dik hi, ġlieda enormi. Anke tara affarijiet ifakkruk fih… fil-bidu, fil-bidu qisni, ma ridtx nara affarijiet ifakkruni fih… imma llum-il-ġurnata, erm … imma dik is-sodda, x'ħin naraha u nidħol f'dik il-bedroom, nibqa' nħoss dak ix-xokk ee."* (lines 359-364) However, you need to fight back… it's a massive fight. That's it, a massive fight. Even certain objects remind me of him … at the beginning, at the beginning kind of, I did not want to see anything that reminded me of him … but nowadays, erm … but that bed, as soon as I see it and go into that bedroom, I still experience a sense of shock
	Exposure to risk	*"... dak kien force 9 ... u letteralment biex… kif inzilna ġo dis-safety boat konna, qisna ee magħluqa... u dis-safety boat ħa tinqeleb, ma tinqelibx…"* (lines 424-425) It was force 9 … and literally, as soon as we got down into the safety boat, we were like erm … it's enclosed ... it was going to topple over
	Coping with stress	*"Inti ġo moħħok ħadd ma jista' jidhol… inti trid tmexxih moħħok. Jiġifieri, jekk inti taf li tazza birra ħa tagħmillek il-ġid, ħa tmur għal tazza birra. Jekk inti taf li tqatta' l-ħin mal-familja ħa tagħmillek il-ġid... Tagħmel l-affarijiet li inti tħobb tagħmel hux"* (lines 384-387) No one can get into your mind … you have to lead it forward. So, if you know that a glass of beer would be beneficial, you'd take the glass of beer. If spending time with your family is beneficial … you do whatever you like to do
Alan	Recurrent associations	*"X'ħin nara tifel f'diffikulta', jew tifla f'diffikulta', nimmaġina lit-tifla tiegħi. Ħadd ma' jrid lit-tfal tiegħu fil-periklu …"*

		(lines 271-272)
		When I see a child in difficulty, I imagine my own daughter. No one wants his children to be at risk
	A changing self	*"Sirt iktar kawt, speċjalment meta noħroġ, noħroġ mal-familja, naqra moħħni hemm ta' x'inhu jiġri, min għandi madwari."* (lines 549-550) I have become more cautious when I go out, when I go out with my family, I am more alert to what is happening and whom I have around me
	Healing through support	*"Imma iwa għalfejn le għall-għajnuna. Ma tagħmilx sens ... alkoħol u drogi. Ma tagħmilx sens, għalijja."* (lines 713-715) Yes, why not, to seek help. It does not make sense ... alcohol and drugs. To me, it does not make sense
Martin	Lack of resources	*"...speċjalment in-nuqqas ta' nies li hawn haw ġew, nuqqas ta' nies, pressure fuqna..."* (lines 27-28) Especially the lack of human workforce over here, lack of staff, and an added pressure upon ourselves
	Supportive measures	*"... l-ewwel ħaġa nibda through t-tabib tagħna ... dak ikun il-first step ... nibda minn hemm, jien personali. Jiġifieri nibda minnu ... naħseb l-iktar persuna li tafni inside out, qed tifhem, allura naħseb l-ewwel… kull puncture, lilu, għandu."* (lines 662-672) I would start with the family doctor … that would be my first step … I'd start from there, personally... I think he's the person who knows me best, so I think primarily … every puncture, I refer to him
	A reflective approach	*"... huma esperjenzi tal-ħajja li jġagħluk taħseb, żgur… li jġagħluk taħseb fis-sens…anke, jew f'liema stat mentali jasal il-bniedem, jew anke, kemm ikollok kuraġġ biex inti tmur fil-ġenb, f'tarf u taqbeż, eżempju…"* (lines 392-395)

		These life experiences make you think … make you think in the sense that … even, the mental state of the person, or even the courage one must have in order to go somewhere, on the edge, and jump off, for example
Simon	Correlation with self	*"Tibda tgħid kieku dak jiġi minni u kieku nafu, jew inkella… ħa naħdem l-istess daqslikieku, ħa nagħti l-hundred percent għalih? … Ħa nibqa nfittixha … daqslikieku persuna nafha, jiġifieri…"* (lines 181-188) I tell myself had this been a relative or someone I know, or … would I work differently, would I give my hundred percent? … I would keep looking … as if I'd known that person
	Increased awareness	*"… iktar ma tikber iktar tinbidel… tibda tara l-affarijiet minn perspettiva differenti, speċi… Tibda tgħid isma', għalxiex ħa nagħmilha dil-biċċa xogħol, speċi jiena, meta jekk jiena, ħa jiġrili xi ħaġa, ħa jbati ħaddiehor?"* (lines 114-123) The older you grow, the more you change … you start viewing things from a different perspective, kind of… you start asking yourself why am I going to do this, when others will carry the burden if something bad had to happen to me?
	Organisational obliviousness	*"…hu jaf jgħidli kemm domt, kemm domt per eżempju… ara xi ġralu bniedem, ara għal xiex dal-bniedem… fhimt?"* (lines 283-285) He might ask me how long I have taken for example … ask him what happened to him instead, why… you understand?
	Strength and toughness	*"… għax tkun sod naħseb. Għax niftakar ta' dik it-tarbija, niftakar, li qed ngħidlek, kien hemm ieħor (għal kollega ieħor) miegħi, jiġifieri. Niftakar kienet l-ewwel ġurnata tiegħu … u l-aħħar ġurnata kienet. Telaq, ma felaħx għaliha, jiġifieri. Imma mbagħad il-bniedem kemm ikun b'saħħtu jiġifieri, naħseb jiena. Nimmaġina li kemm ikun kapaċi jihhandiljaha waħdu…"* (lines 201-206) I believe that it's because you're strong. Because I remember the case of that baby, there was someone else with me. I

		remember it was his first day … and his last. He left, he could not handle it. But then it depends upon the individual's strength, I think. I believe it depends upon his ability to deal with it on his own
Terrence	Emotional havoc	*"...għadu sa llum-il-ġurnata jweġġagħni. Għadu sa llum-il-ġurnata jaħraqni. Meta nitkellem fuqu… ma tantx nieħu pjaċir nitkellem fuqu…meta nitkellem fuqu, it hurts… it hurts a lot…. It hurts a lot…"* (lines 94-97) It still hurts up to this day. It still bothers me up to this day. When I talk about it … I don't really like to talk about it … when I talk about it, it hurts … it hurts a lot … it hurts a lot
	Instability of the job	*"...ix-xiftijiet huma ta' erbgħa u għoxrin siegħa, tibda fis-sebgħa u tispiċċa fis-sebgħa ta' filgħodu. Ikun hemm każi fejn taqbeż dawk il-ħinijiet. Hawn… tkun id-dar f'nofs ta' lejl, iċempillek il-mobile, jgħidlek siegħa u nofs oħra trid tkun ix-xogħol. Iċempillek fis-sagħtejn ta' filgħodu, jgħidlek sal-erbgħa trid tkun ix-xogħol, fil-ħamsa rridu naqilgħu."* (lines 157-162) Shifts are 24 hours long, starting at seven and finishing at seven the following morning. Sometimes, you go beyond these hours. For example …, you'd be at home, the phone rings in the middle of the night, and tells you that you have to be at work in an hour and a half's time. He phones at four in the morning and tells you that you have to be at work by four, as at five we depart.
	Features of organisational support	*"Li jkun xi ħadd midħla fix-xogħol, dejjem ħeqq ħeqq… li jkun qed jilbes daqsxejn iż-żarbun tiegħek dejjem ħa jgħinek iktar għax jekk ħa ngħidlu fuq dan l-oġġett, qed jifhem fuq xiex qed inkellmu…"* (lines 355-357) To have someone who is knowledgeable about the job, that's always … to be able to don your own shoes, that is always going to help you more, because if I talk to him about this issue, he would understand what that issue entails
Joseph	Distressing memories	*"Tħossha hux, għax inti tkun… bħalma ġieli ħassejtha fuq rescues oħra, tibda tismagħhom jgħajjtu għall-għajnuna u ma tistax tarahom, għax ikun ħafna dlam, per eżempju u… tibda tisma' l-għajjat, tibda tgħid minn fejn ġej? U ma jkollhom xejn fuq, x'jin, x'jindikalom… ifhem baħar imqalleb ta' kien, jiġifieri m'għola tlettax-il pied il-mewġ kien, jiġifieri…"* (lines 134-139) It's difficult, especially since you'd be … similarly to other rescues, you can hear them shouting for help, but you can't

		see them, because it's really dark, for example, and … you hear their cries, and ask yourself where it's coming from. And they'd have worn nothing to indicate… the sea was very rough, the waves were thirteen feet high
	Healing in own way	*"Jien ma nafx x'jista jagħmillek imbagħad dax-xi ħadd… le le… għax jiena jekk, per eżempju, ġejt nitkellem miegħek fuq problema, mhux xorta hemm ħa tibqa'? Fil-verita inti trid tkun imbagħad … hemmhekk ħa tibqa' l-problema hux, allura might as well, fis-sens, tipprova tirranġa inti, waħdek u tara naqra…"* (lines 338-348)
		I don't know what this person can do to help you… because if, for example, I came to talk to you about a problem, won't the problem persist? In truth, it depends upon you … the problem will still persist, so might as well, you try deal with it on your own first, and then act accordingly
	Frustration towards organisation	*"… jien din, prattikalment, injoranza naraha imbagħad… li tiġi ordnat li inti… inti kif taf, inti bħala fizzjal, kif taf jien x'għandi bżonn jekk inti lanqas biss tgħix miegħi? Fhimtni? Jew bilkemm tkellimni? Kif tiġi tordnali hekk?"* (lines 418-420)
		This is, practically, foolishness, in my opinion … to be ordered to … how do you know, you, as an officer, how do you know what my needs are, if you don't live with me? You understand? Or if you barely talk to me? How can you command me to do so?
Christopher	Unpreparedness	*"… aħna konna ilna nittrenjaw six months, kont għadni kif ħiereġ mit-training, u qisek tmur b'dik iċ-ċertu pożittivita' li ħa nġibu da żgur, ħa nsalvawh, fhimt? U meta tarah imut, allavolja naf li fil-verita' mhux tort tagħna, pero' il-guilt hemm tkun, fhimt?"* (lines 108-111)
		We had been training for six months, I had just finished my training, and kind of, you approach with a certain positivity, that you're going to surely save this person, you know? And when you see him dying, even though I know that it wasn't our fault, the guilt persists
	A second family	*"…minn ċertu esperjenzi qisek tħossok komdu li titkellem ma' sħabek, u dik tgħin ħafna, għax aħna nifhmu lil xulxin peress li ngħaddu minn ċertu trawma … kollha kemm aħna bħala skwadra qisna għalina hija tajba, għax nifhmu lil xulxin, nitkellmu ma' xulxin u noħorġu minnha. Inkredibbli, imma hekk, hekk taħdem…"* (lines 33-39)

		You feel comfortable discussing certain situations with your colleagues, and that helps, because since we experience the same situations ... we can understand each other better… it is good for all of us as a team, because we understand each other, we talk to each other and we deal with it. It's incredible, but that is, that is how it works
	Avoiding sharing own experiences	*"… mat-tfajla tiegħi ma nitkellimx, għax ma nkunx irrid nallarmaha, jew m'ommi jew… ma' ħadd ma' nitkellem."* (lines 131-133)
		I do not discuss these with my partner, I don't want to startle her, or with my mother or… I don't talk about these with anyone
Raymond	Struggling with emotions	*"… nirrakkonta dawn l-istejjer jiena, ma tantx inħobb nitkellem fuqhom, qishom jiftħuli ħafna… empty… erm, darkness, biex niftehmu jiġifieri…"* (lines 460-462)
		Recounting these experiences, I, I don't like talking about them, it's like they open up a lot of… empty… erm, darkness, kind of
	Acknowledging risk	*"… kelli nitla' minn X biex niftehmu, f'dawk il-kundizzjonijiet, la naf jekk kienx mgħawweg u lanqas jien dritt…"* (lines 223-225)
		I had to get out from X, so as to understand better, in those conditions, not knowing whether it was inclined or straight
	Striving to keep healthy	*"Tipprova tinjorah, tipprova trabbi qoxra, tgħid teliminahom dawn, tgħid dawn mhux vera, dawn mhux nies…"* (lines 623-624)
		You try to ignore it, grow a hard skin, you try to eliminate them, and tell yourself they are not real, they are not people
	Family support	*"… Qisek għandek borża tqila, jew żewġ basktijiet tqal, taqbad teħodlok waħda minnhom, tgħidlek ħa nġorrielek jien, dik hi l-verita'. U minn hemm, inti relieved, toħroġ minnha…"* (lines 1313-1316)

		It's like having a very heavy sack, or two heavy bags, and she just grabs one of them, and tells you that she will carry it for you, that's the truth. And you emerge feeling relieved
Vince	Being impressed by the case	*"… U niftakar, bdejna nimxu jiġifieri u nsibu, biċċiet, sfortunatament, ta' nies. Dawk, ma ninsihom qatt, għax mhux affarijiet li tara kuljum. Kważi kważi lanqas fuq il-films ma tarahom. Fir-realta' tarahom, sfortunatament…"* (lines 120-123)
		And I remember us walking, and finding various body parts, unfortunately. Those, I can never forget, because you do not see these every day. You don't even see these in movies. Unfortunately, you witness these in reality
	Risk and vulnerability	*"Dejjem tara esperjenza ta' ħaddieħor, imbagħad, jiġifieri tgħid, ħa jmissni lili? Meta ħa jmissni lili? Għax kulħadd, min inħaraq, kulħadd xi darba ra esperjenza ta' ħaddiehor u ma basarx li ħa jmiss lilu."* (lines 192-194)
		You always observe others' experiences, then you ask, will it ever happen to me? When will it happen to me? Because everyone, all those who got burnt, had witnessed someone else's experience and never thought one day it will be him
	Supportive entities	*"… nemmen li jekk tmur titkellem, qed issib wens, l-ewwel ħaġa, u ħa tieħu parir kif tista', jew kif tihhandiljahom dawn l-affarijiet…"* (lines 451-453)
		I believe that if you do speak out, you'll primarily find comfort, and you'll also get advice of how to handle these circumstances
Michael	Professional development	*"…Hawnhekk na… immorru training barra minn Malta…"* (lines 64-65)
		Over here, we carry out training abroad
	Being at risk	*"… inti dejjem fil-periklu, dejjem, dejjem… dejjem fil-periklu inti. Dejjem, dejjem."* (line 323)
		You are always in danger, always, always… always in danger. Always, always

	Perceived lack of trauma	*"… Xi kultant noqgħod insaqsi jien… Min hu l-ħażin, jekk hux jien il-ħażin, li per eżempju mmur fuq…. U ma jagħmilli l-ebda effetti…"* (lines 613-615) Sometimes I do ask myself… who is unfit, if it is me that's unfit, that I go, for example… and it does not affect me

The next section of this chapter will analyse all ten cases, in what Yin (2018) termed as cross-case synthesis.

4.4 Cross-Case Synthesis

Throughout the cross-case synthesis, all the cases were compared and analysed, allowing for the emergence of various themes. These themes and super-ordinate themes aim to answer the research questions previously put forth. Three main superordinate themes emerged, these being:

i) The invisible wounds of pain

ii) Winds of change

iii) A distinct language.

The themes and super-ordinate themes, together with a direct excerpt, representing the main ideas behind each super-ordinate theme are portrayed in table 4.2. Each theme will be analysed next.

Table 4.2

Living with Emotional Trauma

Superordinate theme	Reconfigured emergent themes	Thematic excerpt
The invisible wounds of pain	- Psychological suffering - A persistent deathtrap - Organisational distress	*"…jitlagħli ġismi xewk xewk, inħoss il-bard u qisni nibża'… titlagħli għoqda hawn ara, għax vera kienet ta'… ta' mewt"* "…I get goose pimples, I feel cold and kind of afraid…I get a lump in my throat, because it was really…close to death" *(Raymond, line 173)* *"Min qed ibati miegħek? Ta' madwarek… ta' madwarek ibatu miegħek."* "Who suffers with you? Those closest to you… those closest to you suffer too" *(Terrence, line 167)*
Winds of change	- Posttraumatic growth - Focusing on coping - Self-satisfaction	*"Tbiddlek hux…inbdilt, inbdilt…"* "It changes you…I've changed, I've changed" *(Christopher, line 288)*
A distinct language	- A community of its own - Somebody to turn to - Barriers to addressing psychological suffering	*"Jien naħseb biex bniedem jifhem il-kunċett, irid ikun jgħix fil-kunċett"* "I believe that in order for a person to understand the concept, that person must be living in the concept" *(Martin, line 682)*

4.4.1 The Invisible Wounds of Pain

For the majority of the participants, emotional trauma was described as comprising a more personal implication, rather than being solely related to the

anguish and risks experienced on the job. Of significance, participants reported having their own personal struggles to deal with, particularly through the involvement of family members, and the correlation they often made between them and the casualties. Furthermore, issues of organisational disputes were regarded as causing added frustrations. The following subsections will analyse these aspects of trauma.

4.4.1.1 Psychological Suffering. This theme examines the emotional pain experienced by most participants, caused by distressing incidents both on and off the job.

The majority of the participants narrated incidents, which involved either the recovery of dead individuals or the loss of a person during the mission itself. Feelings of guilt and remorse for not being able to save all casualties were prominent, despite them doing their utmost to succeed. These feelings were also reflected in images 1, 2 and 3, with the respective participants expressing a recollection of such feelings whenever reflecting upon that which the images portray.

Image 1

Ferry Terminal (Matthew)

Image 2

Military Watercraft (Terrence)

Image 3

Gozitan Landscape (Joseph)
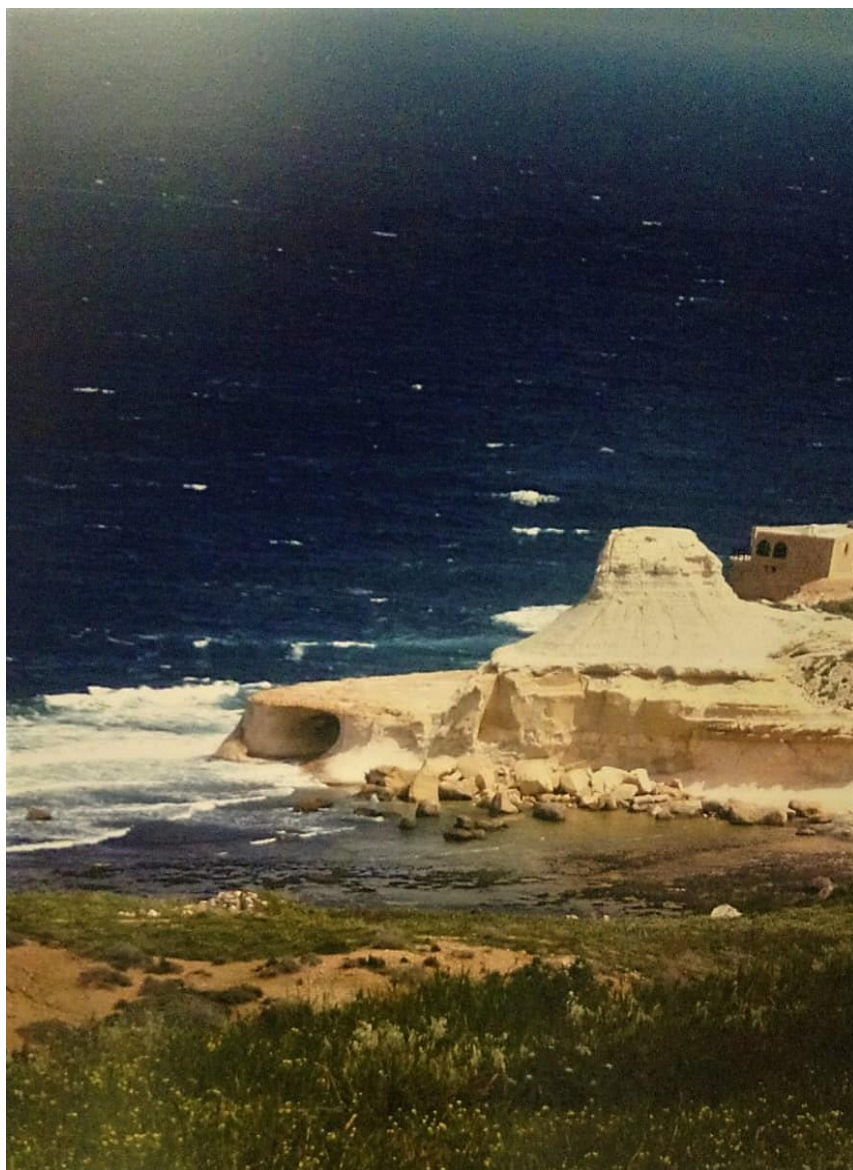
Joseph maintains that although experiencing guilt feelings, he finds solace in knowing that he did his best, and explains:

"… ġieli tħossok, anke inti, guilty, li per eżempju, ma għexitx il-persuna, … inti l-aqwa li għamilt kollox, pruvajt…" (Joseph, lines 294-297)	Sometimes you also feel guilty, that, for example, the person has not made it out alive… what is most important is that you did your best

Christopher and Raymond explained that although each mission is taken on with a positive attitude, an array of feelings, particularly hope, fear and frustration, are experienced at any point during the mission:

"… jiena, kelli hands on, naf x'jiġifieri, naf x'jiġifieri frustration, naf x'jiġifieri ttella' bniedem mejjet, naf x'jiġifieri jmutlek bniedem ġo helicopter, jew mingħalik ittellgħu ħaj, għax inti dejjem pożittiv, u ttellgħu mejjet." (Raymond, lines 1054-1057)

I have hands-on experience, I know what it feels like, I know what frustration feels like, I know what it means to get a dead person onboard, I know what it means for someone to die in a helicopter, or to believe that you might rescue him alive, because you always think positively, only to bring him aboard dead

As reported by most, some experiences remain in memory, due to the uncommon nature of the incidents themselves. Indeed, none of the participants recounted experiences of a routine nature. Conversely, those illustrated presented with distinctive characteristics, such as the perilous weather conditions or rare features of the casualties themselves. For Martin, the aggression exhibited by the victim was sufficient to keep this incident embedded in memory:

"… għadda daż-żmien kollu, bħal speċi, u bqajt niftakar fiha dil-biċċa tax-xogħol… u dil-mara għadni, għadni naraha… niftakar… nara wiċċha…" (Martin, lines 227-229)

All this time has passed, kind of, and I still remember this incident… and this woman I can still, still, visualise her… see her face

Michael noted that he is able to remember all the distressing events, in which he was involved and can give all the details pertaining to the victims:

"… niftakarhom kollha, jiġifieri l-każijiet, jiġifieri, from one… kollha. U saħansitra jiġifieri tgħidli fejn kien hemm nies, fejn kienu mitfugħin in-nies, kif u x'fatta… kollox niftakar… dawn l-affarijiet…" (Michael, lines 260-262)

I remember them all, the cases, from one… all of them. And even if you ask me, where people were involved, where the bodies were and the conditions they were in… I remember everything… everything

Furthermore, one notes that psychological suffering was reported to be related to several landmarks and locations around Malta. Raymond explores this concept further in his images. One notes the variety of depicted Maltese landmarks and his interpretations to each photograph. He further explores this in the following excerpt:

"... f'kull ponta ta' Malta għandi... inħalli timbru jien... Marsaskala, Wied iż-Żurrieq, ta' Fra Ben, id-Dwejra... mela f'kull ponta ta' Malta jiena, immur fejn immur ma nistax ma naħsibx f'dawn ir-rescues li għandi. Fomm ir-Riħ... jiġifieri mad-dawra mejt ta' Malta kollha jien..." (Raymond, lines 695-700)	At every point in Malta, I have… I leave a mark… Marsascala, Wied iż-Żurrieq, ta' Fra Ben, Dwejra… so, everywhere I go, I cannot but think of all these rescues. Fomm ir-Riħ… so all around Malta

Of significance were also the participants' confessions to experiencing sorrowfulness, which could be sensed during the interview itself. Joseph recounts crying tears of sorrow and joy during a particular mission; sorrow for not being able to rescue both casualties and joy, for having saved the life of at least one individual. He recounts:

"... Imma hemmhekk kont... niżilli d-dmugħ letteralment, anke r-rescuer l-ieħor, forsi kienet naqra, ma nafx jekk hux tajba jew ħażina, imma ma kinitx ikkontrollata l-ħaġa minni..." (Joseph, lines 127-129)	Over there I was… literally in tears, even the other rescuer, maybe it was a bit, I don't know whether it was a good or a bad thing, but I had no control over it

Emotional trauma was deemed by most participants to extend also to their own personal challenges. Most participants made reference to various situations in their everyday life, which add on to the hardships already encountered at the workplace. Vince summarises this (lines 384-387) *"... inti trid tqis li n-nies li jaħdmu hawn mhux ħa jkollom problemi tax-xogħol biss. Da jkun ġej mid-dar, problemi fid-dar, problemi fil-familja, u jaf hawnhekk tkun iċ-ċirasa fuq il-kejk..."*

(You have to keep in mind that all who work here have more than work problems. He would be coming from home, so, problems at home, problems concerning the family, and here might just be the cherry on the cake).

Matthew, particularly, was very explicit as to his own personal battles with the death of his father, and reflected this in image 4.

Image 4

Bed (Matthew)

This event brought about various emotions, which have affected the way he performs on his job. Matthew recounts that he has taken on a new outlook on dead individuals, and recounts:

"Imma dik, u di affetwatni fuq xogħli, erm… bniedem mejjet… bniedem mejjet istra… ma bqajtx nittekiljah kif kont nittekiljah qabel, għadni soft… avolja għaddew sentejn għadni soft…" (Matthew, lines 366-369)	But that has affected me on my job, erm… a dead person… a dead person… I have changed the way I handle it; I am still soft… even though two years have passed, I am still soft

The impact caused by the death of a family member appears to be regarded by Matthew as extraordinary, an event which only transpires a few people. He acknowledges having been affected by this specific event, and states (line 487) *"...tal-familja jaffetwawk mod ieħor ee. Tal-familja, jiena, każ, ejja ngħidu straordinarju..."* (When it comes to family, you get affected differently. Such a case is, extraordinary).

Other participants admitted to having experienced various challenges in their personal relationships. Martin, Terrence and Raymond confessed to having had grievous difficulties in their marriage and condemned the organisation itself and the vulnerability caused thereby, for such difficulties. The participants' accounts suggest that the trauma carried by the participants is often transferred onto their families. Most participants described the psychological impact that their job has upon their families. It appears that this instils frustration and a sense of disillusionment that they can have a 'normal' life. Terrence explains this clearly:

"Indirettament jew direttament qed ibatu miegħek, għax tweġġgħek illi, filli sejjer, jien naf, barbeque, forsi ħa tiltaqa' daqsxejn ma' ħutek, tkun ilek ma tarahom, u f'daqqa waħda tispiċċa tara 'l sħabek tax-xogħol..." (Terrence, lines 169-172)	Indirectly or directly they suffer with you, it hurts to be at one point going to, I don't know, a barbeque maybe, meeting up with your siblings, whom you wouldn't have seen for a while, and all of a sudden, you find yourself with your colleagues

In his account, Raymond hints at his annoyance and displeasure for having his family involved in his dilemmas. He explains this by stating:

"Jien il-mara ħallejtha tiekol f'restorant weħidha, darbtejn jew tlieta. Il-landrover wara r-restorant, u nitlaq... bħal tal-films, titfa' l-flus u titlaq ... Iċemplulek, jibgħatlek land rover... taf kemm-il darba ħallejthom ma' ħut il-mara t-tifel iż-żgħir jien?... filli qed id-dar filli kelli nidħol?... M'għandekx idea." (Raymond, lines	I left my wife all alone in a restaurant, twice or three times. The landrover waiting for me behind the restaurant... just like in the movies, you pool in the money and you leave … they phone you and send over the landrover… have you any idea how many times I left my children with my siblings-in-law? … one minute I'm at home, the next I'm at

993-1002)   work.… You have no idea

Three participants made note of feelings of uncertainty about what the future holds. Making these remarks, undeniably brought about feelings of desolation and ambiguity, as can be comprehended in the following excerpt:

"Id-domanda tiegħi kultant insaqsi lili nnifsi stess, għax mingħajr ma trid taħseb, ngħid imma la, la jgħaddi iktar żmien jew forsi la nitlaq minn hawn, ngħid nittama li dawn ma jsirux episodji li jkissruk mentalment…" (Martin, lines 381-384)	The question, which I, at times, ask myself, because you end up thinking, without even wanting, I tell myself, I hope that these episodes do not break me down by time or when I leave this job

4.4.1.2 A Persistent Deathtrap. Noteworthy were the participants' statements related to the threats posed upon them by the nature of their job. Several participants explained that often, they need to carry out missions in bad weather conditions. Matthew, Joseph, Christopher and Raymond, all described instances, in which the weather conditions were so extreme, that they feared for theirs and their team's lives. This was also represented in images 5 and 6, both of which illustrate an upcoming thunderstorm. Raymond also submitted image 7, to narrate one of the toughest missions he was engaged in.

Image 5

An Approaching Storm (Christopher)

Image 6

Weather Front (Raymond)

Image 7

Gozitan Landmark (Raymond)

Joseph encapsulates such instances (lines 221-222) *"… tlettax-il pied il-mewġ, inżilt għaliha, dlam ċappa…"* (The waves were thirteen feet high, I went down for her, in pitch darkness). Raymond and Matthew substantiate this through the following excerpts:

"… Dik hemmhekk qed taraha visibility? Not more than 300 metres. Grigalata, waħda mill-iktar grigalati b'saħħithom dawn l-aħħar 40 years. Hemmhekk ir-riħ kien 58 knots wind…" (Raymond, lines 413-424)	Can you see the visibility over there? Not more than 300 metres. Strong winds from the north-east, one of the worst storms in the last 40 years. The wind was 58 knots.
"… Kien gale warning, il-baħar… sa ma tlajna, kien baħar… bdejt inrodd is-slaleb, bdejt ngħid jiena x'qed nagħmel hawn, x'qed nagħmel hawn jien?" (Matthew, lines 398-400)	It was gale warning, the sea… until we got there, the sea was… I was making the sign of the cross, and telling myself what am I doing here, what am I doing here?

Images 8 and 9 are related to Joseph's statement of having to work in pitch darkness and thus, representative of the night conditions. Raymond explains that not all equipment is armed with suitable instruments to be made use of at night. Indeed, Raymond narrates several situations, which occurred at nighttime, one of which had resulted in a near-death encounter.

Image 8

Sunset (Raymond)

Image 9

Flying in Darkness (Raymond)

The participants also reported being persistent to successfully carry out all missions, so much that at times, they also endanger those on board the vessel. Martin illustrates a case, whereby his crew insisted on continuing a particular mission, jeopardising all crew onboard, as the aircraft had only five minutes before ditching straight into the sea. He narrates:

"… jgħidulha bingo fuel, jiġifieri, l-aħħar five minutes u ried jirritorna bilfors għax inkella jaqa' hu…" (Martin, lines 254-256)

It is called bingo fuel, meaning, it only had five minutes left before returning to base, otherwise it would have ditched

In another situation, Alan stated to having compromised himself, when choosing to defy protocols and come into direct bodily contact with illegal immigrants. Alan explains that at that moment, he felt he had no other choice, and did not think about the consequences that could have resulted from such behaviour. Conversely, he later acknowledged his mistake and explained (lines 312-313) *"… Ma kellix ħwejjeġ… m'erġajtx għamilta ħa nkun onest miegħek, sirt nilbes il-ħwejjeġ…"* (I did not have any suitable clothing… honestly, I did not do it again, I started putting the clothes on).

Additionally, the majority of the participants disclosed that the working conditions put them in a vulnerable state of mind. Predominantly, most acknowledged the long working hours and their efforts to do personal chores or added jobs on their days off. Christopher describes (lines 11-13) *"… 24 rest off, jiġifieri ġieli nagħmlu sebgħin siegħa f'ġimgħa, u tipprova fir-rest u l-off timla kemm jista jkun…"* (24 rest off, sometimes we work seventy hours a week, and they you try to fill as much as possible on yours days off). Raymond goes a step further and calculates the time he is expected to spend at work:

"… jiena diġa' naf li hawnhekk ħa

I already know that I will be spending

ngħix seba' snin minn ħajti, għax twenty… għax jiena ħa nagħmel 25 years of service, dejjem ħdimt bix-xift, 24 in, 48 out …" (Raymond, lines 844-846)	seven years of my life in here, because twenty… I will be doing twentyfive years of service, and have always worked on a shift basis, 24 in, 48 out

Simon's and Terrence's narrative supplements that of other participants. They point out their work schedule and further comment upon the extra hours, which they need to perform. Simon describes (line 230) *"… aħna ġieli minn jumejn għamilna ħamest ijiem…"* (Sometimes instead of two days, we worked for five). Furthermore, Terrence also comments upon the lack of sleep and mental exhaustion posed by these hours. Several participants also accounted to the extra duties posed upon them during their off duties and the unreliability of having an actual day off. Indeed, both Simon and Raymond explain that they frequently have to report back to work, particularly when short of staff. This instability also appears to cause added burden, especially when having to make alternative arrangements or cancel premade plans.

4.4.1.3 Organisational Distress. Of significance throughout the interviews were the remarks that all participants made in relation to organisational characteristics that appear to instil feelings of unrest and emotional disturbance. There was a noteable impression of them being just a number. This was presented mainly in remarks made about the lack of appreciation and lack of understanding from higher personnel. Terrence claims:

"… m'hemmx dak l-apprezzament tax-xogħol li qed nagħmlu. Inħoss li… li… m'aħniex apprezzati… m'aħniex apprezzati…" (Terrence, lines 328-329)	There is no appreciation at the work we do. I feel that… that… we are not appreciated…. We are not appreciated

This lack of understanding was regarded by both Simon and Joseph, who gave details as to the insentient attitudes of some colleagues and the insensibility with which some instructions are given out.

Distress was also noted when discussing matters of future planning. Three participants brought up the subject of a deficiency in the recruitment of younger soldiers, with Michael detailing:

"… fejn fi żmieni kien hemm elf ruħ biex jinkitbu ġol-army, issa hemm 25 miktubin għar-reklutaġġ li jmiss…" (Michael, lines 742-743)	Whereas in my days a thousand people enrolled in the army, only 25 are enrolled for the next recruitment

The participants explained that such a small number of recruits adds to the job's pressures. Furthermore, they commented upon the extra hours and extra duties they have to perform, to make up for tasks that could be carried out by other members, had the numbers been copious. These participants explained that such responsibilities have brought on fatigue and dissatisfaction with the job.

Some participants pointed out various duties that they are expected to carry out. Raymond describes a typical day at work, and unknowingly instils a sense of stress upon the researcher. He describes:

"Mela jien irrid immur innaddaf, mela jien f'xi ħin irrid innaddaf, illejla għandi night flight illejla jien ukoll. Kelli l-isparar dalgħodu, meeting miegħek, għadni bilkemm ħadt biċċa ħobż. Mela issa jaf tinqala' xi ħaġa, forsi noqgħod naqra għall-kwiet wara nofsinhar, u rrid nibda nipprepara for another. Hawnhekk bħalma jgħidu laħam mibjugħ…" (Raymond, lines 892-897)	I have to go clean up, at a certain point I need to clean up, I have a night flight tonight. I had a shooting session this morning, a meeting with you, I haven't even eaten a piece of bread yet. Something might come up after this, then I may find some peace in the afternoon, and then I have to prepare for another. Like they say, over here, we have no control over our own lives

Apart from this busy schedule, their responsibilities, especially towards other crew members, were also emphasised. Alan noted (line 924) *"… Inħoss ċertu responsabbilta' lejn in-nies ta' taħti…"* (I feel responsible towards junior staff). Both images 10 and 2 reflect this perceived responsibility.

Image 10

Military Aircraft (Martin)

Worth mentioning is Raymond's distress in relation to the judicial system. Raymond mentioned that his involvement in two particular cases had him witnessing in court. He notes that no prior or formal training could have prepared him for what he experienced at the time and acknowledges the emotional disturbance he felt, predicting future anguish:

"… kelli nitla' l-qorti jien… Kelli nagħti xhieda tiegħi l-qorti, jien mhux l-ewwel darba li tlajt il-qorti ta, hawn min ħadd ma… hawn min qatt ma' resaq lejn il-qorti hawn… imma jien, ġiex każi jaħarqu, tnejn imwiet… kelli	I had to go to court… I had to bear witness, it is not the first time I went to court, there are some who… some people have never been to court over here… but I've been, on two tough cases, two deaths… I had to go to court. Do you

nitla' l-qorti. Taħseb li jiena, jekk ħa mmur xi darba l-qorti jiena... taħseb li mhux se nġarrab fihom dawn il-problemi?" (Raymond, lines 1080-1088)

think, that if I ever have to go to court… do you think I won't find it agonising?

Three participants made further reference to this lack of preparedness, particularly in relation to the training they had received. They comment on the gap between theory and practice and their unpreparedness to deal with actual cases:

"Allavolja ttrejnjajna għal ħafna żmien, imma fil-verita' r-realta' hija differenti ħafna…" (Christopher, lines 77-78)

Even though we trained for quite a long time, but in truth, reality is very different

Another major characteristic of the organisation was the lack of freedom to make own choices. All participants conceded to the discipline, which the military embraces, however, made several remarks about this matter. Terrence explains (line 102) *"… ikun hemm deċiżjonijiet li ma jkollokx kontroll fuqhom int…"* (Some decisions you have no control over). In other circumstances, Alan reflects upon situations in which he felt he had no choice but to consent for issues, which he did not approve of. He claims (line 100) *"… Qisu ma kellekx option oħra sa ċertu punt…"* (You had no other option, up to a certain extent). Additionally, Raymond remarks upon his powerlessness in participating in this study, explaining that had the situation been otherwise, he would have declined to participate. He also expressed frustration towards the intermediary for having chosen him instead of any other soldier and states (lines 1107-1115) *"… għalfejn intgħażilt jien biex niġi llum? Din għalija kienet żejda… għalfejn… għalfejn jien? Min-nies kollha għalfejn jien illum?"* (Why was I chosen to come here today? This was unneccesary to me… why… why me? From all these people, why me?).

4.4.2 Winds of Change

Subsequently, the participants reflected upon both the positive and negative changes that have transpired since being exposed to trauma, as represented by the term *'Winds of change'*. The following sections will give details pertaining to how the participants believe to have transitioned, as well as the mechanisms employed that allow them to strive further.

4.4.2.1 Posttraumatic Growth. This theme explores instances whereby the participants reported to having altered their outlook on life and engaged selves in a process, through which personal meaning was acquired.

Of significance in this theme is the correlation that eight participants made between the casualties and their families or themselves. Joseph explains (line 157) *"… iġġonġi dak il-mument mal-affarijiet li jkollok…"* (You supplement that particular moment with whatever is going on in your life). Indeed, Joseph and Raymond put forth images 3 and 11 respectively, in an attempt to symbolise such correlation.

Image 11

A Fisherman's Boat (Raymond)
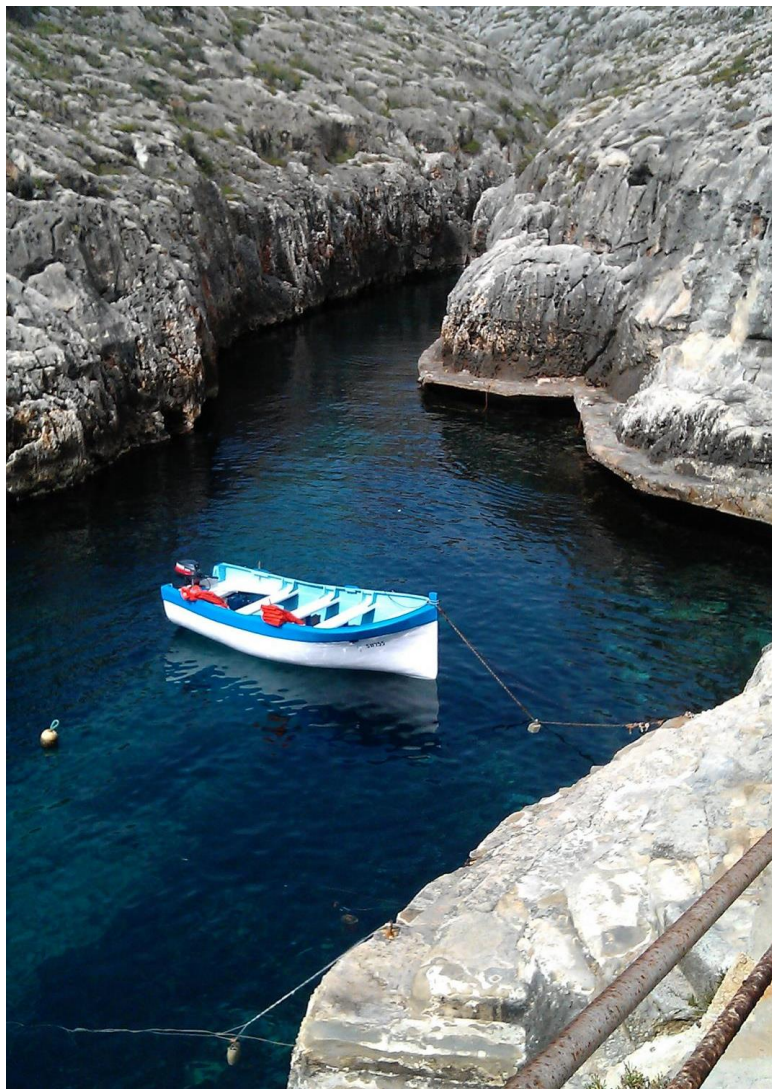
Other participants reflected upon reasons as to why such correlation was made. Matthew claimed (line 194) that one particular victim was similar of age *"...kien qisu aħna... 23 kemm kellu?"* (He was comparable in age to us… 23 maybe?), whereas Christopher (line 185) attributed one victim to his father, who had died of similar conditions *"Jista' jkun forsi ħabba l-papa' tiegħi... għax miet b'heart attack..."* (Could be because my father died of a heart attack).

The participants reported that such an association has made them more aware of the consequences arising from different activities. Indeed, Alan admits (line 627) *"… ġejt konxju ta' ħafna affarijiet, ħafna ħafna affarijiet…"* (I have become aware of many things, many, many things). In relation, an altered perspective was acknowledged by Joseph (lines 244-245) *"… qisek tiġi iktar aware ta' x'jista' jinqala'… tibda tara l-perspettiva tiegħek…"* (You become much more aware of what can transpire… you start establishing your own perspective). Many attributed this change to becoming more mature, however Christopher noted that such a transition occured upon confrontation with death:

"… peress li naraw il-mewt, qisek tħares lejn il-ħajja differenti, tapprezzaha iktar…" (Christopher, lines 292-293)	Because we often encounter death, we look at life from a different perspective, we appreciate it more

The transition from a frivolous being to a considerate individual was accounted for by all participants. Two participants reported being told by others that they have changed. Matthew states (line 514) *"Hu jgħidli, kemm ilek suldat inbdilt, isserjajt, jgħidli…"* (He tells me that since joining the army, I have changed, I've become more serious). Likewise, Terrence reveals (lines 25-26) *"Min jafni… kif kont għoxrin, ħamsa u għoxrin sena ilu għallum, jgħid mhux l-istess persuna…"* (Those who know me… the way I was, twenty, twentyfive years ago, in comparison to today, recognise that I'm a different person).

Four participants described how they have transitioned. Terrence describes how he has come to see himself (lines 30-31) *"Imdejjaq, x'ħin inħares lejn il-mera u da, ngħid aħjar kif kont, kalm, happy go lucky…"* (I'm sad, when I look in the mirror, I tell myself I was much better off before, calm, happy go lucky).

Conversely, Christopher acknowledges having transitioned to a better self, especially in handling distressing situations at work:

"… dak iż-żmien ma kontx naf kemm qed inbati fil-verita'. Eżempju llum, reaction tiegħi ta' wara r-rescue llum ma' dak iż-żmien hi differenti, qed tifhem?" (Christopher, lines 265-267)	Back then I had no idea how much I was suffering. Today, for example, my reaction after a rescue is much different to that compared at the time, you understand?

This transition could not have transpired without the participants' reflections. Indeed, many acknowledged to frequently reflect upon their experiences, in an attempt to learn and grow as individuals. Martin highlights this matter in a modest statement (line 392) *"… huma esperjenzi tal-ħajja li jġagħluk taħseb, żgur…"* (These life experiences for sure make you reflect).

4.4.2.2 Focusing on Coping. This theme explores the mechanisms employed by the participants, in an attempt to handle their own anguish. The majority of the participants accounted to using adaptive coping strategies to maintain their wellbeing. Indeed, Christopher and Matthew reported to performing physical activity, with Matthew giving details as to how sports helped him deal with his father's death (lines 351-353) *"Jien l-isports il-fejqan tiegħi jiġifieri… anke dakinhar tal-funeral stess filgħodu, qomt fis-sitta ta' filgħodu, mort nittrenja, mort niġri, mort bir-rota ġifieri…"* (Sports is my medicine… even on the day of the funeral, I had woken up at six in the morning, and I went to train, I went running, I went cycling).

Conversely, retaining a leisurely interest was deemed by Raymond to be extremely difficult. Raymond admits his struggles to engage in what used to be his main pastime, that of diving, and reflects this in image 12. He reports to having retained all the equipment, however, is unable to look at it, let alone make use of it.

He recounts (line 537) *"… Jiena l-equipment tiegħi d-dar, lanqas irrid narah. Mhux bilfors?!"* (I have my equipment at home, I can't even bear to see it). Instead, it appears that he holds onto that which makes him disregard all these recollections, which is flying. Raymond confesses that he finds peace in flying, however, is limited as to how often he can perform this. He explains (lines 907-908) *"… kif nistartja helicopter, il-problemi kollha ta' ħajti, they they they, they fly away…"* (As soon as I switch the helicopter on, all my problems, they they they, they fly away).

Image 12

Divers (Raymond)
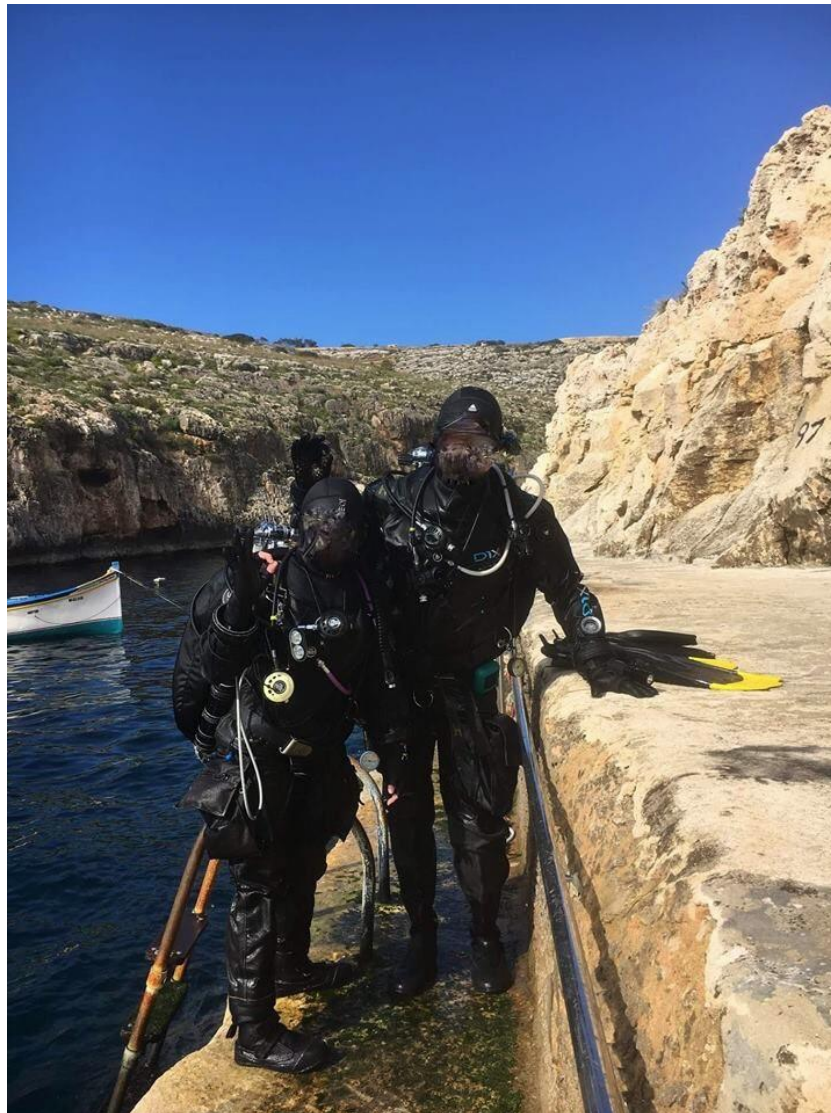
In another instance, Martin retained that through keeping a positive outlook on life, he finds himself in harmony when reflecting upon all the good things that life has provided him with (lines 386-387*) "… at least tipprova, tipprova taħseb fis-sabiħ biss tal-ħajja."* (At least you try to only think about life's positive aspects).

Seven participants expressed that having faith also aids in shirking the negative memories, as knowing that some ulterior being watches over, brings peace of mind. Several remarks were made praising God that no harm has trespassed:

"… tgħid ara Alla kemm hu kbir, kemm ma ried jinqalali xejn…" (Simon, lines 163-164)	You realise that God is great, He did not want anything to trespass me
"Għax jien ma mittx, u ma qtiltx lil kulħadd, b'dawk it-tnejn li tellgħajt, għax Alla ried… m'hemmx iktar… Alla ma ridniex dakinhar…" (Raymond, lines 189-195)	Because I did not die and killed whoever was with me, including those two that we saved, because God wanted… there's no other reason… God did not want us that day

Martin elaborates on this further, and confesses that he indulges in prayer, to pray for the wellbeing of his team (line 397) *"… nitlob, u kull darba li nitlob hawn, nitlob li ma nigref lil ħadd…"* (I pray, and each time I pray, I pray that I do not harm anyone).

Furthermore, many participants focused on the opportunities provided by the army, to enhance their professional knowledge. They acknowledged that through witnessing how foreign military organisations operate and through learning new techniques, wellbeing is maintained. This is illustrated in Christopher's excerpt:

"Allura ġejt iktar b'kuraġġ, qed tifhem, ġejt iktar b'saħħti. Għax anke t-training, eżempju, u kif tiħhandilja rescues, biex tkun iktar safe… hemmhekk ġejt trejnjat iktar… mhux għax hawnhekk m'hawnx training tajjeb ta, training tajjeb ħafna, imma iktar ma' titgħallem m'għand nies differenti,	I came back with more courage, with more strength. Even for example, the training, and how to handle rescues, to be safer… I was trained harder over there… not that we are not well-trained over here, because we get very good training, but the more you learn, especially from different people, the

iktar ħa tavvanza hux." (Christopher,   more you advance
lines 221-225)

Matthew explained how his willingness to learn has presented him with new opportunities. He explains (lines 15-17) *"… inħobb dejjem nitgħallem affarijiet ġodda hux… dejjem lest li nitgħallem, jiġifieri… jiġuni opportunitajiet fuq il-linja tiegħi, ħa noħodhom…"* (I like learning new material… I am always ready to learn… if opportunities come along, I get involved). Additionally, Vince explained that most learning occurs through reflecting on previous experiences. Indeed, he acknowledges having more confidence performing a task the second time round, as illustrated below:

"… nħossni li tjibt fix-xogħol, fis-sens, nihhandleja l-affarijiet aħjar, meta inti għamilt, għaddejt minn esperjenza l-ewwel darba, it-tieni darba tkun differenti, it-tieni darba tkun differenti, għax l-ewwel darba tkun qatt ma rajt, tkun qatt m'għaddejt minnhom. Allura meta ħa tmur it-tieni darba tgħid ara wisq probabbli ħa jkunu bħalma kienu d-darba l-oħra, fhimt? U dejjem tibni…" (Vince, lines 232-238)	I feel I have become more confident in my job, I can handle things better, when you go through an experience for the first time, the second time will be different, the second time will be different because in the first instance you will have not experienced anything of the sort. So, when you go the second time, you think that most probably they will be like the last time, you understand?

Matthew substantiates Vince's remark when claiming (lines 561-563) *"…ix-xogħol jgħallmek. Iktar ma taħdem, iktar ħa titgħallem. Trid iż-żmien, mhux oġġett ta' sena, sentejn, fhimt? U…u dejjem trid, trid… trid tkun lest ukoll."* (You learn through your job. The more you work, the more you learn. You need time, it can't happen in a year or two, you understand? And… And you always need to be prepared).

Five participants explained that most learning occurs informally, through the sharing and retelling of past experiences. Terrence concedes to this idea, and states (lines 72-73) *"… meta taħseb fuqha, jew meta jkollok lil xi ħadd miż-żgħar, tibda*

trewwem, trid bilfors issemmijielu…" (When you think about it, or when you're teaching a new recruit, you have to mention it).

Joseph further clarified that it is not just the retelling of experiences that increases knowledge, but also hands-on performance. He explains that through allowing a newer recruit to do the task first, learning can be more easily achieved. Furthermore, his statement suggests that he tends to feel composed when knowing that his colleague is capable of pulling him out of harm's way:

"Qabel tajt ċans lil rescuer ieħor, sewwa, ħabba li fl-istess ħin għadu junior, jien irrid ngħallmu lil dan li isma', pprova inti l-ewwel… bla dubju ta' xejn li lilu trid ittih ċans, għax jekk jiġri xi ħaġa lili, kif ħa jsalva lili, fhimta?" (Joseph, lines 116-121)	I first gave the other rescuer a chance, since he was still a junior, and I have to teach him, to give it a shot himself first… without any doubt, you need to give him a chance, because if something happens to me, how can he save me?

4.4.2.3 Self-Satisfaction. The satisfaction of having successfully rescued individuals in distress appears to be a constructive facet of the job, with some participants referring to it as 'rewards'. Matthew acknowledges the hardships they encounter on their missions, but hints at giving more prominence to the success of a rescue (lines 65-66) *"… Dawk huma rewards li tiftakar… kemm tkun bagħtejt u rriskjajt fuq ix-xogħol u mar, mar sew."* (Those are the rewards you will remember… how much you suffered and risked on the job, but everything went, went well). Similarly, Terrence accounts (lines 146-147) *"… jien xogħli hu li nsalva l-ħajja, is-sodisfazzjoni tiegħi hu li dħalt hawn, u, u li salvajt ħajja, ngħid ġibna bniedem qawwi u sħiħ."* (My job is to save lives, I find satisfaction in coming to work and save lives, to tell myself we brought back a human being alive).

The desire of human beings to do good to others and to be there in times of need appears to be fulfilled in these jobs. Such successes are also represented in images 2, 10 and 13.

Image 13

Search and Rescue Boats (Matthew)

Through image 2, Terrence expresses that despite having numerous negative recollections of the vessel, the crew's accomplishments need also be acknowledged. He further explains that satisfying memories were not solely related to that particular vessel, but to others (lines 110-112) *"… meta tiċċaqlaq minn post għal ieħor, jew hawnhekk minn fuq lanċa għal fuq lanċa… qisek, tieħu nies, avventuri ta' fuq dik il-lanċa… Kien hemm episodji sbieħ fuqha wkoll…"* (When you're transferred from one place to another, or in our case, from one boat to another… you kind of hold on to the personnel, the aventures related to that boat… there were several pleasant memories aboard too).

Several participants confessed that in situations whereby not all casualties can be rescued, the thought of having done their utmost provides some sort of consolation. Simon describes giving his all in these occurrences, and such thought helps him deal with his feelings in a positive manner (line 196) *"Għalija ġieli*

għamilt iktar milli suppost, allura ma nħossnix guilty…" (Personally, I sometimes did more than I should have, so I don't feel guilty about it). Terrence concurs with Simon, and their accounts hint towards personal fulfilment:

"… dejjem tajt mhux il-hundred percent ta'… iktar…. biex ngħid isma', li… ħdimt fuq dil-persuna …l-iktar l-iktar meta kont search and rescue… daqslikieku persuna nafha, jiġifieri… mhux hekk, just kemm għamilt xogħli…" (Simon, lines 185-188)	I always gave not just a hundred percent, but more… to tell myself that… the way I performed in that case… especially when I was in search and rescue… it was like I knew that person… and not just having done my job
"… bqajt nagħti l-mija u għaxra fil-mija tiegħi…" (Terrence, line 206)	I kept on giving a hundred and ten percent

Noteworthy during the interviews was the sense of pride that all participants, unmistakeably, demonstrated. Matthew portrays that it is chiefly the satisfaction that the job itself bestows upon its members that instils such pride (lines 393-394) *"… għandi xogħol li jiena kburi ħafna bih jiġifieri… kburi li tani sodisfazzjoni…"* (I have a job, which I am very proud of… proud that it has given me a lot of satisfaction). Other participants acknowledge that despite all hardships, it is indeed, this sense of personal fulfilment that makes them love this job even more.

"Ma nbiddlu ma' xejn ta'… sar il-vokazzjoni tiegħi issa." (Vince, line 201)	I will not change it for anything else… it has become my vocation
"… jiena, nieħu minni, ikollok ċertu pride. Jiena l-fatt illi… ija jien inħossni kburi, ma nistħix ngħid jiġifieri… iġġorr ċertu pride miegħek, jiġifieri isma' jiena nagħmel dax-xogħol, jiena hekk, fhimt? Taf kif?" (Matthew, lines 702-704)	I take it from myself, you carry a sense of prideness. The fact that… yes, I do feel proud, I am not shy of saying it… I carry a sense of pride with me, that I do this job, that I do this, you know? You understand?
"… kieku ma nħobbiex (għall-armata) mhux ħa nagħmel das-sagrifiċċju, imma it's fucking sagrifiċċju… sagrifiċċju kbir…kbir." (Raymond, lines 898-900)	If I did not love it (referring to the army), I wouldn't be making such a sacrifice… It's a fucking sacrifice…. A big, big sacrifice

4.4.3 A Distinct Language

The third super-ordinate theme *'A distinct language'*, looks at the support and information that the participants received or expect to receive, from the organisation, colleagues and family. The term was chosen due to the unique nature that most participants argued the military retains, which will also be portrayed in this theme.

4.4.3.1 A Community of its Own. Interestingly, the participants often spoke of their own squadron as a community with which they identified themselves. This sense of belonging was illustrated particularly through remarks that colleagues are considered as second family. Four participants made direct reference to this, explaining that they spend such a considerable amount of time at work that it is impossible not to get to know each other on a more personal level:

"… kważi kważi tista' tgħidilhom tal-familja għax iktar ngħix magħhom milli ma' tad-dar…" (Joseph, lines 388-389)	You can almost call them family, because I spend more time with them than with my family

The idea of a community based on mutual trust was evident amongst all participants. Christopher explains that this feature establishes a comfort zone, in which all members can be free to express themselves and share concern with each other. Christopher further explains that this sharing of experiences helps alleviate psychological suffering (lines 36-39) *"… kollha kemm aħna bħala skwadra qisna għalina hija tajba, għax nifhmu lil xulxin, nitkellmu ma' xulxin u noħorgu minnha. Inkredibbli, imma hekk, hekk taħdem…"* (It is good for all of us as a team, because we understand each other, we talk to each other and we deal with it. It's incredible, but that is, that is how it works).

Moreover, Joseph mentions feeling concerned for his colleagues, particularly when called out on a mission. He described feelings of unrest and uneasiness, due to not knowing what situations they have encountered. Joseph admitted to frequently checking their location, until their return:

"Anke jekk ma jkunx imissek ir-rescue u ħa joħorġu rescue sħabek, ma tkunx komdu sakemm jiġu lura e… u jien normalment nidħol fuq ir-radar ħa nara fejn waslu u x'qegħdin jagħmlu, jiġifieri… ikun moħħni hemmhekk…" (Joseph, lines 320-323)	Even if it's your colleagues' turn for the rescue, not yours, you don't feel comfortable until they get back… normally, I go into the radar system, to check their location and what they're doing… my mind would be focused there

This sense of comradeship was also evoked by Terrence through image 2.

4.4.3.2 Somebody to Turn To. Throughout the interviews, it became evident that a formal, professional support system was lacking in all squadrons. Furthermore, despite sharing a sense of comradeship and connectiveness, most participants stated that their families remain their main support system. This was prominent in Raymond's account, who expressed that the road to healing starts at home:

"Dik l-għajnuna, l-għajnuna minn hemm, minn hemm. Jiġifieri jekk mhix problema għall-mara, mhix problema għalija. Jekk problema għall-mara, ten times għalija. Dik hi, jiġifieri t-terapija hija, trid tiġi mid-dar…" (Raymond, lines 1292-1295)	That is help, help starts from there, from there. So, if it's not a problem to my wife, it's not a problem to me. If it's a problem to her, it is ten times more to me. That is, therapy, it has to come from home

Having considered the burdens that families share with active soldiers, Raymond recognises that if any professional support ought to be sought, this should also involve other family members (lines 1296-1297) *"… qabel ma tibda t-therapy mal-individwu, trid tibda t-therapy ma' tal-familja l-ewwel…"* (Before starting therapy with any said individual, there should firstly be therapy with the rest of the family).

Two other participants articulated that they find themselves more at ease talking with a known professional, particularly their family doctor. Indeed, Martin noted the following:

"… it-tabib tagħna, apparti li ilu jħabbat wiċċu miegħi, jiġifieri… u iktar bħal speċi jkun jafek close u hekk… bniedem jafek iktar, naħseb l-iktar persuna li tafni inside out, qed tifhem…" (Martin, lines 666-671)

My family doctor, apart from putting up with me for a long time … he would kind of, know you better ... I think he's the person who knows me best, you know

In addition, some participants acknowledged that informal support does exist within the army, with Joseph and Vince explaining that it is possible to get assistance from higher ranking officers. Both clarify that if this support is not offered by the officer himself, they are most often referred to an outside entity, which is deemed to handle their problems best:

"… Jew inkella titkellem fl-army stess, ukoll issib. Jiġifieri jekk ikolli mmur għand X, ngħidlu isma' għandi problema, nixtieq inkellem lil xi ħadd fuq din il- problema, naħseb li żgur ħa jqabbadli…" (Joseph, lines 466-469)

If you speak up, you will also find within the army. So, if I had to go to X, and tell him that I have a problem, or would like to speak with someone about this problem, I think he will definitely refer me to someone

Recognising the need for professional support was perceived as challenging amongst the participants. Whilst most acknowledged that talking about own distress improves overall wellbeing, only half of the participants reported to being willing to seek alternative forms of support. It was observed that younger participants were less willing to look for professional support, as opposed to older participants. This was also noticed in a comment made by Terrence (lines 281-282) *"Illum li qed nikber iva ta'…illum tibda… tibda tirrealizza li ma tibqax li tkun, allura bla ma trid ikollok tibda taċċetta ċertu affarijiet."* (Yes, especially now that I am getting older… you start realising that you are no longer the person you used to be, so, unwillingly, you have to start accepting things as they are).

Furthermore, two of these participants confessed to having already reached out for specialised support. In one instance, Vince acknowledged to having been only once, at a time when he was encountering personal challenges. In contrast, Raymond admitted to having finally chosen to go into therapy, after feeling no longer able to handle this distress on his own. Despite having placed significance upon the need for family therapy, Raymond did not disclose whether his family will also be involved.

Some participants also discussed the circumstances under which they would look for professional aid. Most prominent was being informed by others of noticeable changes in personality. Christopher and Joseph both explained that changes in attitudes and behaviours are most often picked up by others, rather than selves. They described this as being the primary reason for pursuing support:

"… toqgħod fuq li jgħidulek in-nies naħseb, għax biex… jien eżempju ngħid għandi problema, ma narax li għandi problema…" (Christopher, lines 348-349)	I think you have to rely on what others say, because… for me, for example, to admit to having a problem, when I can't visualise any problem

Conversely, Matthew argues that symptoms of lasting dysthymia would persuade him to seek help, whereas for Martin, this would transpire only upon the persistent recollection of distressing memories:

"… nibda nħossni mdejjaq hux… nibda nħossni… imdejjaq, ezatt…" (Matthew, line 633)	I start feeling sad, I start feeling… exactly, sad

"… jekk dawk l-affarijiet jibdew, bħal speċi idejquni jew jibqgħu f'moħħi, naħseb hemmhekk qisu… iddoqq il-qanpiena li…" (Martin, lines 591-593)	If these things start to, bother me or persist in my mind, I think that is when… the bell will ring

Another notion, which proved significant during the interview was the participants' expectations of what would constitute a sound support system. Eight of the participants argued that unless being in a position to truly understand what the military signifies, what its expectation and requirements are, and what the military culture entails, then professional support can be of no benefit. Raymond asserts this when claiming that to truly come to an understanding of what trauma entails, one needs to have had previous first-hand experience (lines 1050-1053) *"… biex tħoss dak li qed inħoss jien, you either have experience in my field, għax inti kif tista tifhimni lili, qed nara ċappa dlam u qed iħossni ħażin? You can never understand this, you can never..."* (In order for you to feel what I am feeling, you either have to have experience in the field, because how can you understand me, when I tell you that I'm seeing darkness and feeling devastated? You can never understand this, you can never). This argument was also substantiated by Terrence:

"… Li jkun xi ħadd midħla fix-xogħol, dejjem ħeqq ħeqq… li jkun qed jilbes daqsxejn iż-żarbun tiegħek dejjem ħa jgħinek iktar għax jekk ħa ngħidlu fuq dan l-oġġett, qed jifhem fuq xiex qed inkellmu…. Jekk jitkellem ma' xi ħadd hekk naħseb ikun qed jifhem iktar il-… l-ambjent li tgħix fih u li taħdem fih. Ikun hemm bżonn hux naħseb, kieku, kieku tkun iktar ideali…" (Terrence, lines 355-364)

For someone to be aware of our job, that's always… it helps more if that person is able to get in your shoes, because if I speak to him about this issue, he'd understand what that consists of… If you talk to someone like this, I think he will be better able to understand… the conditions we live and work in. I think it's needed, and would be more ideal

The idea of a civil individual offering professional support was disregarded by almost all participants. The participants' accounts suggest that there is little trust in what can be achieved through such a support system. Indeed, Vince and Alan questioned how understanding a civil individual can be of a military being:

"… bniedem pajżan mhux ħa jifhem is-sistema tal-army…" (Vince, line 448)

A civil being cannot understand the way the army operates

"… ċivil ma jifhimniex lilna l-militar…" (Alan, line 999)	Civilians cannot understand us, the military

4.4.3.3 Barriers to Addressing Psychological Suffering. Half of the participants admitted to being reluctant to seek help from an unknown individual. The majority stated that they prefer to deal with their anguish on their own. Vince recaps this (line 346) *"… nemmen li kemm jista' jkun l-ewwel nipprova nsolviha jiena…"* (As much as possible, I try to firstly solve it on my own). Others reported being unaware of their own issues, as stated by Joseph (lines 334-335) *"… trid tinduna li għandek problema, għax il-bniedem, naħseb jien, l-aħħar wieħed li jsir jaf li għandu problema …"* (You have to be conscious that you have a problem, because, I believe, the person is the last to know that there is a problem).

Additionally, several participants, some of whom expressed an inclination for support, expressed that mental strength can be the answer for dealing with emotional trauma. Raymond declared that through being mentally strong, he has managed to overcome many aspects of emotional distress. He related this characteristic to a survival skill, which he believes all those within the military need to possess.

"… il-karattru kollox ta, il-karattru tal-persuna. If you're weak, you won't survive… kultant il-karattru, if it's strong character, jekk inti għandek karattru sod… you cope with those things…" (Raymond, lines 1263-1268)	It all depends on the character, the person's character. If you're weak, you won't survive… sometimes it's the character, if you have a strong character… you cope with those things

Likewise, Christopher and Simon expressed that through maintaining good mental wellbeing, the impact of emotional trauma is diminished. Furthermore, they explained that this has also helped them cope, and thus, have felt no need to pursue professional support. On similar lines, Matthew reported that only the individual

himself is proficient enough to know how to best cope with trauma. These arguments are illustrated below:

"… għax tkun sod naħseb… imbagħad il-bniedem kemm ikun b'saħħtu jiġifieri, naħseb jiena…" (Simon, lines 201-205)	Because you're strong, I believe… then it all depends on how strong that person is, I think
"Inti ġo moħħok ħadd ma jista' jidħol… inti trid tmexxih moħħok…" (Matthew, lines 384)	No one can get into your mind … you have to lead it forward.

Other reasons for not seeking professional support were associated with unwillingness to share own experiences. Five participants reported having doubts as to how confidential support sessions tend to be. In this case, the participant made reference to an individual working within the organisation, who supposedly provides emotional support to military personnel, and confided to having heard reports of breach in confidentiality from his end. These instances have left these participants sceptical as to whether one should seek out support, and if so, whom to reach out to. Michael reports:

"… sfortunatamant il-ftit nies li nafu li marru għandu, il-problemi li kellhom huma ġrew ġol-army kollha …" (Michael, lines 707-708)	Unfortunately, the few people whom I know have reached out to him, had all their troubles publicised with the whole army

Moreover, there also appears to be stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour. Michael acknowledges this, and claims that most share the mentality that this expresses weakness (lines 412-414) *"… Forsi dak li jkun jaf żammha għalih u qatt ma' tkellem ma' ħadd, għax forsi issa ħa… jew forsi jidher weak, fhimt?"* (Maybe that person chose to keep it to himself and not speak to anyone about it, maybe because… others would regard him as weak). Similarly, Alan expressed being reluctant to share his suffering with his senior officers, out of fear that

professional advancement is repressed. The stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour and with mental illness itself poses several misconceptions about the notion of emotional trauma.

Throughout the interviews, the lack of appropriate information became apparent, particularly when the participants brought forth arguments related to signs and symptoms of distress, professional support and coping. Indeed, Matthew claims that he can identify these through a noted change in behaviour, such as social isolation and tearfulness. This was similarly stated by Christopher in a discussion right after the interview, who asserted that a joyful and thrilled attitude signifies good mental wellbeing.

"Nagħrfu għax jactja differenti hux… ħa jactja… ħa… differenti… ħa jkun the odd one out… jien naf, jinqatalek waħdu, ma jkellem lil ħadd, ma jikolx, jibki… ħafna…" (Matthew, lines 605-609)	I recognise him, because he'd act differently… he'd act… differently… he'd be the odd one out… I don't know, isolate himself from others, not speak to anyone, not eat, cry… a lot

Furthermore, two participants expressed negative views in relation to medication-taking, claiming that pharmacological treatment has the tendency to turn an individual into an unemotional and impassive being:

"Jien ħa noqgħod nieħu l-kalmanti? Noqgħod qisni xi… bniedem stuppin, niċċassa?" (Terrence, lines 259-260)	I'm going to take tranquillisers? To end up zoning out… staring?

"Il-medication tad-depression, jiġifieri, jiġu mellowed, jiġu… taf inti." (Matthew, lines 263-264)	With antidepressant medication, they become mellow, they become… you know

When discussing matters related to stigma, issues of humiliation at getting assistance from others arose. Matthew and Alan referred to this and explained that when sessions about mental wellbeing were organised by the military, most

attendees refrained from discussing their own issues, out of fear that others make fun of them. Alan states (lines 1043-1044) *"… imbagħad tagħmillu ħajtu miżerja għax joqgħodu jitnejjku bih…"* (They make his life miserable, because they make fun of him). Matthew confessed that such humiliation had already trespassed other members (lines 589-590) *"… jagħmlu laqa', pero tkun… inkunu klassi, taf kif? U min jipprova jiftaħ dak li għandu ġo qalbu, sħabu jitnejjku bih, taf kif?"* (They organise a meeting, but it's more like… a class, you know how? And whoever tries to express himself, finds himself being made fun of by his colleagues).

Hesitancy to feel disturbing emotions and the thought of being misinterpreted or labelled by others also act as barriers. Simon acknowledges this (lines 298-299) *"… Mhux kulħadd jifhmek u speċi… u mhux kulħadd jitkellem, jekk ikollu xi ħaġa mhux kulħadd jitkellem…"* (Not everyone can understand you… and not everyone talks, if something is wrong, not everyone talks). Furthermore, Raymond explains that he shirks away from discussing these matters, as recounting these experiences brings about feelings of emptiness, or as he preferred to call it, darkness (lines 460-462) *"… nirrakkonta dawn l-istejjer jiena, ma tantx inħobb nitkellem fuqhom, qishom jiftħuli ħafna… empty… ermmm... darkness, biex niftehmu jiġifieri…"* (Recounting these experiences, I, I don't like talking about them, it's like they open up a lot of… empty… erm, darkness, kind of).

Lastly, one participant recognised the lack of knowledge and awareness in relation to issues of mental wellbeing. Terrence acknowledges (lines 256) *"… in ġenerali ara naħseb m'hawnx daqsekk awareness"* (In general, I think there is not much awareness). Furthermore, Terrence explains that being in the military signifies a greater risk of developing emotional trauma and other forms of mental disorders. He recognises the need for improved support services and increased understanding

of what truly constitutes mental wellbeing. He states (lines 271-273): *"Ma naħsibx li hawn daqsekk... naħseb hawn bżonn u m'hawnx daqsekk awareness li, li għandna bżonn iktar għajnuna…"* (I don't think there is enough… I believe there is the need, but there is not much awareness that, that we need more help).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the main findings of this study. Three super-ordinate themes emerged from the cross-case synthesis. The first super-ordinate theme, *'The invisible wounds of pain',* explored the perception of emotional trauma amongst active military personnel. The second super-ordinate theme, *'Winds of change',* looked at how the participants perceived themselves as having changed over the course of time and identified the coping mechanisms employed. The last super-ordinate theme, *'A distinct language'*, explored the type of support most participants receive and wish to receive, as well as the reasons behind their reluctance to seek out professional support. Thus, this chapter provided an in-depth discovery of what living with emotional trauma signifies to active military personnel.

In the next chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed in relation to the existing literature, together with the theoretical frameworks put forth in chapter 2.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The aims of this study were to explore how active military personnel perceive emotional trauma and how traumatic experiences alter and affect their coping behaviours. A case study design was used to address these aims, whereby ten male participants were subjected to an interview and asked to capture images, which depict traumatic experiences and their impact upon their personal and professional lives. This study addressed both a local and an international gap in the literature, as prior to this study, no studies had yet explored this relationship. In view of these aims, this chapter will portray a critical discussion of the findings in light of the existing literature, the Salutogenic Model of Health (SMH) and Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity framework. Lastly, the methodological issues pertaining to this study will be illustrated.

The critical discussion of this study will follow a pattern similar to that of the findings. The categories chosen are representative of the superordinate themes, these being:

i) Giving meaning to emotional trauma (The invisible wounds of pain);

ii) The impact of emotional trauma (Winds of change);

iii) Uniqueness of military culture (A distinct language).

5.2 Giving Meaning to Emotional Trauma

The term "rescue workers" has been defined by Sifaki-Pistolla et al. (2017) as "individuals that on professional or voluntary basis engage in stressful activities targeted at providing assistance to people in emergency circumstances" (p.46). Several researchers (Berger et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2013) agree upon the high probability rescue workers have of developing trauma, which has not yet been analysed amongst the different rescue workers, particularly amongst military personnel performing search and rescue (SAR) missions.

The duration and frequency in exposure to traumatic events appear to have a significant impact on the prevalence of stress (Harvey et al., 2016; Milligan-Saville et al., 2018; Schwarzer et al., 2016). Hence, participants with a minimum of five years' experience were included in this study, hoping that the number of distressful events reported will influence its outcomes. Nevertheless, one must maintain that the number of witnessed events may not necessarily be representative of the distress' severity, as even one drastic event can leave a significant impact. Coping factors playing a role in this regard will be discussed later on.

According to Schneider et al. (2012) the aspects making up emotional trauma are multi-dimensional, being psychological, physical and occupational in nature. The participants mainly identified psychological suffering, risks and organisational distress as constituting emotional trauma; these will be discussed separately in relation to the available literature.

5.2.1 Psychological Suffering

Feelings of remorse, hope, fear, inadequacy, frustration and satisfaction, were all verbally and non-verbally expressed as experienced throughout any mission.

Feelings of remorse and frustration were evident when narrating fatal events, whereas fear was evident when recounting events related to unknown victims' conditions or unpredictable weather conditions. The feeling of "not knowing" what to expect reportedly increases stress and agitation. Several of these emotions were also referred to in the photographs. The vessels used during SAR missions offer a particularly strong recollection of these emotional struggles, as do the various Maltese landmarks depicted in chapter 4.

Police officers in the study by Backteman-Erlanson et al. (2011) acknowledged their emotional turmoil when faced with critical situations, as well as their perceived lack of control and inadequacy over unsuccessful circumstances. Likewise, participants in the study by Walker et al. (2017) reported emotional distress through art therapy, as represented by dark colours, sealed mouths, lightning bolts and bloodshot eyes. Additionally, feelings of guilt, particularly during unsuccessful missions, were made reference to by Berger et al. (2012).

Hyperarousal, mainly difficulties in falling asleep or maintaining sleep were reported by Terrence, Joseph and Christopher. Jones et al. (2018) and Carey et al. (2013) reported similar results. The relationship between sleep and mental distress has been extensively studied (e.g. Brown et al., 2017; Cheng & Cheng, 2017; Hughes et al., 2018; Pallesen et al., 2018), however, further research is needed to clarify whether mental distress is the primary cause for disturbed sleep or vice-versa. In contrast with Carey et al. (2013), findings from the present study indicate that even experienced rescue workers can be affected by hyperarousal. Other symptoms of hyper-arousal include irritability and anger outbursts, both of which were extensively reported by the participants. Michael remarks *"… nintilef again… skużi*

l-espressjoni, skużi, ninfaqa' nidgħi…" (I lose control of myself… forgive me for the expression, I start swearing).

Psychological suffering was evident in the unusual nature of the narratives, exposing the harsh reality of facing death, perilous weather conditions, transferable diseases and severe body injuries. Incidents, which can cause self-injury, appear to augment the emotional burden carried by military personnel. Similarly, Milligan-Saville et al. (2018) report an association between incidents involving some form of threat to self and an increased risk for mental distress.

The distress caused by the first missions was recalled by various participants. The increased risk of developing signs of distress during the career's early days was substantiated by Carey et al. (2013) and Kaufmann et al. (2013). This may be due to the initial lack of resilient factors, naivety and perceived low levels of support (Fjeldheim et al., 2014). This statement relates with Carey et al.'s (2013) notion that those who have been considerably exposed to trauma adopt resilient factors that turn them into *"survivors"*, suggesting that the initial naivety in dealing with trauma might make these some of the most debilitating events for rescue workers.

Psychological suffering was reportedly induced further by the knowledge that the participants' families have to endure both the volatility of their job and their psychological load. Studies (Bakhurst et al., 2018; Beck et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2017) have noted the role that mental distress plays in the marital relationship's quality. Furthermore, Bakhurst et al. (2018) accentuate the importance of the female figure in adapting to the relationship's needs and engaging in positive communication with the male counterpart. This was substantiated in this study through Raymond's acknowledgement of his wife's support *"… Qisek għandek borża tqila, jew żewġ basktijiet tqal, taqbad teħodlok waħda minnhom, tgħidlek ħa*

nġorrielek jien... U minn hemm, inti relieved, toħroġ minnha…" (It's like having a very heavy sack, or two heavy bags, and she just grabs one of them, and tells you that she will carry it for you...   And you emerge feeling relieved).

Varying levels of distress were reported by the participants. Some participants claimed to having been unaffected by traumatic experiences, whereas others expressed that emotional trauma has taken over various aspects of their lives. This matter goes in line with Antonovsky's SMH, which establishes that each individual is exposed to various stressors in life, the management of which depends upon the availability and management of various general resistance resources (GRR). Antonovsky uses the metaphor of the stream of life to put forth the idea that no one can stay within a safe environment (the shore), but has to work through life's tribulations to reach either the *"gentle stream"* or *"dangerous whirlpools*" (Eriksson, 2017; Langeland et al., 2007; Vinje et al., 2017).

Indeed, it appears that Michael and Matthew have made well-use of the available GRR. Conversely, Terrence and Raymond both expressed having reached a chaotic point in their lives, with Raymond admitting to having sought professional support, after feeling no longer able to tackle such distress on his own. This finding is supported by Brooks et al. (2015) and Taylor et al. (2019), who suggest that the resilient factors employed by rescue workers appear to be critical in the perceived levels of distress. Furthermore, Raymond's and Terrence's narratives illustrate that GRR arising from the entity itself, such as a sound support system, also play a role in managing distress (Fjeldheim et al., 2014).

The next section will discuss the organisational traits identified by the participants as posing additional burden to their struggles.

5.2.2 Distress caused by Organisational Traits

The instability and the inadequacy of the working conditions created notable tension amongst all participants. In some instances, these issues took over the majority of the interview, evidence that such organisational traits also disrupt the participants' mental wellbeing.

Brooks et al. (2015) and Jones et al. (2018) point out the detrimental effects that several job demands can have upon mental wellbeing. The 48-hour shifts worked by the participants in the study by Jones et al. (2018) reflect that worked by the participants in the current study. Indeed, Simon and Raymond both acknowledged to having worked a considerable amount of hours when off duty. Raymond also accounted to the busy agenda constituting a normal shift. Unknowingly, listening to Raymond's description of what a normal work schedule entails instilled stress upon the researcher. As the researcher, I could not help but imagine the uneasiness and apprehension felt by most soldiers on a normal working day, let alone in circumstances of added risks. Terrence further described how a normal night unfolds, illustrating a picture of mental exhaustion and vulnerability.

Of concern was also the imbalance between their professional and personal lives, with most participants recounting that more time is spent at work rather than in recreational activities, disrupting family relationships and functioning. These situations not only increase the probability of mental health issues, but pose increased safety risks, particularly that of making unnecessary mistakes.

Additional factors included the lack of human resources, as evidenced by participants accounting to role blurring, particularly in performing tasks that, had there been enough manpower, could be completed by others. Undeniably, role

blurring creates tension, especially since additional training must be primarily undertaken. The psychological impact caused by these demands was reported by Brooks et al. (2015).

The poor environmental conditions present within the squadrons also posed a concern. Sarcastically, Raymond described *"… darba kull tlett ijiem norqod hawn jien, ġo sodda hemm ġew. Nurik fejn tgħidx kemm tieħu pjaċir, qisha l-Hilton. Ee… qisek qiegħed il-ħabs, il-ħabs probabbli isbaħ."* (Once every three days I sleep over here, in a bed over there. If I'd show it to you, you'd be surprised, it's like Hilton. Erm… it's like being in prison, most probably it's better in prison). Such could also be observed around the units at the time of the interviews, and although works to improve such conditions were gradually ongoing, these were limited with financial constraints.

A satisfactory and safe working environment is pivotal in providing sound general wellbeing (Brooks et al., 2015; Nappo, 2019). The inadequacy of some vessels, the shortage thereof and the risks thereby encountered have been regarded by the participants as posing unwanted distress, particularly when carrying out missions with vessels unsuitable for the prevalent conditions. In this regard, the sense of loyalty and desire to rescue casualties appear to win over such risks, highlighting that the success of a mission "always comes before the individual" (Hall, 2011, p. 12). Having the adequate manpower and equipment leaves much to the imagination, especially when considering the insufficient financial investment by higher operating entities.

Additionally, many participants reported to having been mentally unprepared to deal with distressing events. Matthew referred to this when stating the differences between performing a CPR on a mannequin and an actual human being, whereas

Michael and Christopher talked about the disparities between reality and practice. Brooks et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of rescue workers having additional training that helps them build a comprehensive ability to deal with emotional trauma. Details of such training were put forth by Meredith et al. (2011).

Another constituent that appears to instil distress is their lack of freedom, particularly in relation to partaking in this study. The subjects of discipline and obedience, even when not in the best interest of those involved, has been an ongoing issue of debate. Weber (2017) theorises:

> Good order and discipline is the crucial component of military effectiveness. Military units require good order and discipline because military service requires a subjugation of self to the good of the whole to a degree not understood in civilian society, requiring service members to set aside their natural instincts of self-preservation and comfort-seeking behaviour. (p.176)

This statement declares that discipline forms the basis upon which the military operates. Through discipline, soldiers are trained to dutifully obey the commands of higher-ranking military personnel, at the cost of their own beliefs, feelings and values. According to Coll et al. (2011), obedience is a virtue of the military, which is unlikely to be challenged by its subordinates. The notion of discipline illustrates that although it might instil frustration, it is actually a fundamental element of what makes a soldier, who must always suppress their autonomy to the welfare of others.

In the next section, the tangible tension characterised by the loyalty towards the army and the distress, which it exposes its members to, will be discussed.

5.2.3 Loyalty Above All

Despite expressing frustration and concern over various military facets, the loyalty and proudness underlying the participants' accounts was conspicuous. This loyalty was chiefly accounted for by Matthew, who regularly stated that he feels proud of his job. The devotion towards the military was more subtly reported by Terrence and Raymond. Undeniably, this brings up questions related to how loyalty can be deemed more important than wellbeing itself. The concept of loyalty must, in consequence, be primarily understood.

Loyalty, which has long been considered as a work ethic within the military (Jones, 2010; Olsthoorn, 2019), has been defined by Connor (2010) as "an emotion that is central to group and individual identity formation. It is crucial to social action and it operates at different levels" (p. 279). Aiding with the formation of a personal or group identity, loyalty overpowers the human moral virtues comprised of anxiety, fear and guilt (Connor, 2010). During recruitment, former identities are torn apart and rebuilt to form the military identity. Joseph accounted how this helped him become the person he is today. Furthermore, through a postulated hierarchy and chain of command system, military members obey commands without further rationalisation (Connor, 2010).

Atuel and Castro (2018) noted that through persistently upholding the norms and rules constituting the military, active soldiers maintain physical and psychological preparedness for any upcoming incidents. The soldiers' loss of personal identity, and the onset of military identity shared between military personnel is hereby worth noting. Factors, such as the chain of command and military identity are the main components of a military culture, better denoted as a "warrior culture" (Atuel & Castro, 2018, p. 79).

It therefore becomes apparent that through the military, soldiers gain an identity and a status within the wider societal context. The loyalty of soldiers towards that which bestowed this identity is significant amongst the participants. This, together with their desire to aide those in need, appear to surpass all the adversities and hardships comprising the job. Serving the military remains central within this community, regardless of the consequences brought about.

The following section will discuss how traumatic events have affected military personnel.

5.3 The Impact of Emotional Trauma

Despite participants reporting varying levels of affect, research has shown that it is very unlikely for an individual witnessing a distressing event to remain unchanged (Berger et al., 2012; Harvey et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2013). This reported impact can be summarised in Vince's statement: *"... ħajti nbidlet minn kemm ilni naħdem hawn..."* (My life has changed since I started working here), indicating that despite being unwilling to accept distress, the effects of trauma are real and diverse.

The significant rates of clinical depression, trauma and anxiety disorders noted in retired rescue workers (Harvey et al, 2016; Kaufmann et al., 2013) indicate that it is unlikely to do away with the effects of trauma, and answer Martin's question: *"... u kultant ngħid... jista' jkun fil-futur dawn, dawn l-episodju, ħafna episodji... li ħa jkissruk mentalment?"* (Sometime I tell myself … could it be in the future, these, these episodes... that they will mentally break you?).

Notwithstanding, the changes brought about by these events are authentic, and reflect what the person deems himself to have become. In the next sections,

these will be discussed under two main headings, *coping with trauma* and *a person in transition*.

5.3.1 Coping with Trauma

The phrases 'mental strength' and mental wellbeing were interchangeably used throughout the interviews, particularly in conjunction to coping. Also referred to as psychological resilience (van der Meulen et al., 2018), Quinn and Cavanaugh (2017) define mental strength as "a set of attributes that allow an individual to persevere through difficult circumstances that ultimately lead to successful outcomes" (p. 36).

Conversely, mental wellbeing comprises multidimensional factors related to a positive state of physical, social and mental health, focusing not only on the absence of illness or incapacity, but also on an achieved sense of purpose and full social participation (DEFRA, 2007). Whilst dissimilar, the two terms are interrelated, as mental strength contributes to mental wellbeing. Having a healthy state of mind depends greatly upon everyday coping strategies.

Findings from this study suggest that both mental strength and mental wellbeing posed an issue to participants who acknowledged their losing battle with trauma. The notion of mental strength and mental wellbeing is in harmony with the SMH, which takes into consideration the various GRR, or coping strategies, that an individual can utilise to move towards the ease end of the continuum.

The perceived impact of any event is also dependant upon the coping mechanisms embraced (Schwarzer et al. 2016). According to the literature, two types of mechanisms can be employed, namely approach coping styles and avoidance

coping styles. The findings of this study will be discussed in the following sections under the named headings.

5.3.1.1 Approach Coping Mechanisms. Various approach coping mechanisms were described, which have been positively associated with the perceived lack or diminished effect of trauma, anxiety and depression (Morgan et al., 2017). Two participants focused upon sports as the sole mechanism helping them maintain mental wellbeing, whereas other participants availed themselves of other pastimes.

Considering that the military allocates a specific time period to perform exercise during a normal shift, it comes as a surprise that some participants reported distress. This finding opposes that reported by Arble and Arnetz (2017), whose participants reported a higher tendency to resort to physical activity with increased exposure to stress. Were this so, more participants would have resorted primarily to exercise as a means of coping. In contrast with Arble and Arnetz (2017), Stubbs and Vancampfort (2017) indicate that symptoms of stress and anxiety may, in truth, hinder a person from performing physical activity, as more energy is expended in dealing with the symptoms themselves.

Furthermore, physical activity has been regarded as both an approach and avoidance strategy, whereby it can act both as a means of reflection upon the events that have trespassed and a distraction from the pain caused by these incidents (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Arble et al. 2018). This was demonstrated through Matthew's experience of dealing with his father's death, whereby the use of exercise could have acted as a distraction from the painful thoughts of having to soon bury his father.

Maintaining a positive outlook on life was also considered by some as an adaptive mechanism. For Martin, keeping an eye out for life's positive aspects aides in forgetting whatever proves to be difficult. Although not reported in the literature review, other studies (Cohen, 2002; Sagone & de Caroli, 2014) have regarded this as a critical adaptive strategy amongst populations undergoing numerous distressing events.

Five participants accounted that faith helps them positively cope with the job's challenges and recounted to frequently praying for the wellbeing of the squadron, whilst turning to God to thank Him for not undergoing any harm. Studies performed by Carey et al. (2013) and Morgan et al. (2017) found no significant correlation between prayer alone and improved mental wellbeing. According to Morgan et al. (2017), it is the support derived from attending religious services that improves mental health. Since the participants in this study did not divulge how and where they prayed, this claim could not be proven. The religious values of the Maltese community may have attributed to this finding.

Formal and informal professional development has been regarded as a valuable coping mechanism (Carey et al., 2013). Opportunities for training in a setting different from the norm, despite scarce, aid soldiers in sharing knowledge and experiences with other soldiers worldwide. The knowledge of having upcoming training appears to instil a sense of security; security that certain skills will not be lost and new abilities will be learned. Backteman-Erlanson et al. (2011) reported a link between feeling secure and increased confidence in successfully carrying out missions, and highlighted that such training can augment the individuals' sense of effectiveness and control over various situations. The importance of effective

training in the form of technical knowledge and cognitive abilities was further substantiated by Brooks et al. (2015).

Conclusively, the sharing of knowledge, regarding how to best manage traumatic situations and the emotional turmoil caused thereby, was also considered as an approach strategy. This strategy was regarded as the second-most effective by Carey et al. (2013). Discussing distressing issues with peers offers a pathway through which emotions related to such experiences are identified and dealt with, leading to overall wellbeing (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Arnetz et al., 2018). Additionally, this strategy has also been linked to posttraumatic growth (PTG) (Arble & Arnetz, 2017), which will be discussed in a later section.

5.3.1.2 Avoidance Coping Mechanisms. Unlike the findings reported by previous studies (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Morgan et al. 2017), few avoidance strategies were communicated by the participants in this study. Notwithstanding, these studies remarked that the use of such strategies leads to multifaceted detrimental effects and an overall decrease in wellbeing. Arble and Arnetz (2017) make note of the reinforcement patterns created through avoidance strategies, particularly in eliminating unpleasant feelings, thus failing to learn how to cope or alleviate distress.

Avoidance strategies were hinted at by the participants in a subtle form. Case in point, Raymond acknowledged to having difficulty engaging in his favourite pastime, that of diving. The experiences, which Raymond associates with his hobby, hinder him from doing that which ought to have a reversal effect, consequently instilling added suffering. According to Morgan et al. (2013), disengagement from pleasurable activities is strongly affected by the presence of stress during the activity

itself. Similarly, Held et al. (2011) suggested that through disengagement, the individual avoids managing the thoughts and emotions arising from that particularly stressful event.

Christopher also reported to using social isolation as a means of coping. Social isolation, and the lack of communication with other individuals offer less opportunities to gain insightful views into managing stress. This mechanism may also augment other avoidance strategies, including denial and behavioural disengagement (Yu & Sherman, 2015). In relation, one notes Christopher's disengagement from his family and denial concerning how trauma has affected him.

The high comorbidity rates with alcohol dependence and misuse reported by previous studies (Harvey et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2013) was not substantiated in this study. Indeed, none of the participants claimed to resorting to alcohol. Alan reported to being against such behaviour and states: *"Hawn min, jintefa' fuq l-alkoħol, ... bla sens, personali jien, ma tagħmilx sens... m'għandekx għajnuna hekk"* (There are some who resort to alcohol… it makes no sense, personally… you will not get help like that). This finding contradicts those found by Micallef-Grimaud (2016), whereby one participant had admitted to coping through alcohol misuse.

Rumination, or the persistent thinking about an event or its effects, was also frequently accounted for. A correlation between symptoms of depression and the adoption of rumination was noted by Thompson et al. (2010), whereby it was suggested that rumination is highly dependent upon the utilisation of active coping styles, highlighting the importance of focusing chiefly upon approach strategies. Furthermore, findings imply that rumination leads to an increased probability of mental illness (Gartner et al., 2019). In the current study, participants who often

engaged in rumination reported to feeling overwhelmed by distress. Particularly, Raymond, Terrence and Martin revealed their struggles in handling recurrent traumatic thoughts.

5.3.2 A Person in Transition

Most participants accounted to how trauma has altered various aspects of their lives, placing significance upon increased alertness with regards to ordinary issues of safety. Christopher, Alan, Simon and Vince depict this increased awareness, or hyper-vigilance, a vital constituent of clinical anxiety, affecting both its prognosis and severity (Dalgleish et al., 2001; Holowka et al., 2012). This indicates that although not accounted for, participants who reported symptoms of hyper-vigilance may be undergoing periods of extreme stress.

In a study conducted by Dekel et al. (2014) amongst former prisoners of war, symptoms of depression emerged as major constituents of PTSD, with the former becoming more prominent in the long-term. This was similarly reported by Schindel-Allon et al. (2010) and was hereby substantiated through Terrence's account, who described how traumatic events have changed him into a more disheartened being. Harvey et al. (2016) also accounted to this finding, whereby results revealed that the chance of suffering from depression and other comorbid disorders increases following retirement. Dekel et al. (2014) report that symptoms of depression arise following the exhaustion of available coping strategies and impairment of normal functioning. Hence, these researchers hint at the availability of adequate mechanisms, such as professional support, that aide in increasing resilience.

Furthermore, a conflicting image surfaced between the calm and relaxed nature physically portrayed by the participants and the emotional turmoil expressed

during the interviews. This split sense of self has also been put forth by the participants in the study by Walker et al. (2017).

Five participants recounted that witnessing traumatic events has transformed them into more contemplative beings, altered their perspective on life, and became absorbed in life's hardships, particularly through the process of reflection. In line with previous research (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Brooks et al. 2015; Tedeschi & Caloun, 2004), these participants hinted at PTG, surfacing from the perceived positive outcomes of emotional trauma and a sense of personal accomplishment and satisfaction. Devotion, loyalty and proudness towards the military appear to also instil PTG (Brooks et al. 2015), as was reported by participants claiming to not being affected by trauma.

Conclusively, participants hinted at feelings of consolidation in unsuccessful missions, bearing in mind the supreme efforts invested into each mission. Additionally, Brooks et al. (2015) posit that involvement in humanitarian acts helps in diminishing levels of burnout and distress. Although this was not directly investigated, narratives put forth by the participants reveal inconclusive outcomes. The majority of those who reported to becoming overinvolved in numerous missions, conceded to high levels of distress and considerable disruption in everyday life. Similarly Cardozo et al. (2012) gave details pertaining to possible burnout and fatigue following overinvolvement in various incidents.

Issues related to professional support and reasons for not reaching out will be discussed in the next section.

5.4 Uniqueness of Military Culture

Showing comprehension of the military culture aides in understanding better the participants' narratives. The military holds values and behavioural norms that are unique and distinctive to itself (Burgo-Black et al., 2016; Siebold, 2001). Stoicism, or the endurance of emotional suffering without due complaint, is another trait of the military (Weiss et al., 2011), becoming apparent in the participants' narratives when discussing matters related to support and mental wellbeing.

The formation of a community with similar beliefs and objectives and with psychological differences from the civilian world, hence, is inevitable (Coll et al., 2011; Hall, 2011; Walker et al., 2017). Indeed, several participants in this study referred to their squadron as a second family, highlighting both the trusting relationships present between members and the sense of belonging and comradeship that was further observed within each barrack.

Nevertheless, the stereotypical facet of gender within the military cannot be eliminated. The concepts held by the military are in line with Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity framework. Indeed, one can note the higher end of the chain of command and hierarchy systems being occupied predominantly by male officers. The various roles endorsed by the military also appear to be dependent upon gender. In fact, through observations made upon each squadron's premises, males were carrying out operational duties, whereas females were submerged in office work. This evident difference in gender roles was accounted for by van Gilder (2019), whose study portrayed the masculine environment created by the military. The concept of masculinity, as being created by various cultural and societal norms and values, can be easily envisioned in this regard.

In view of this distinct culture, three sub-themes emerged. Their findings will be discussed in two main sections, namely *barriers to tackling psychological distress* and *somebody to turn to*.

5.4.1 Barriers to Tackling Psychological Distress

The need for having increased awareness and knowledge about mental health and emotional trauma, especially, was put forth by various participants. Despite this, scepticism surrounding professional support was disclosed. Several researchers (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Carey et al., 2013; Schwarzer et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011) highlight the significance of regular support following exposure to trauma. Nevertheless, these researchers do not identify the type of support needed and who should be providing it.

Findings from this study reveal that scepticism is surrounded by feelings of humiliation, lack of trust, stigma, and appearing to be weak. Indeed, two participants described having witnessed their peers being humiliated by their colleagues, for speaking up about personal mental health issues. Another participant described how reaching out for mental health care can halt diverse military opportunities. Stigma within the military has been extensively studied, as has been the idea of missed career advancement (Hall, 2011; Hom et al., 2017; Pols & Oak, 2007). Fear of being misunderstood by professionals and fear of re-experiencing overwhelming emotions have also been put forth as barriers, with Raymond making use of the word 'darkness' to describe the devastating affect of rekindling traumatic experiences. Weiss et al. (2011) make reference to such fears, linking these to stoicism.

Moreover, several participants remarked upon the concept of maintaining face-value, through portraying selves as capable of overcoming all hardships, thus

highlighting uncertainties over the efficacy of professional support. This was expressed by various participants, particularly by Joseph, who stated: "*Jien ma nafx x'jista jagħmillek imbagħad dax-xi ħadd*" (I don't know what this person can do to help you). Instances of breach in confidentiality were also put forth, as had been previously suggested by Coll et al. (2011), Hom et al. (2017) and Pols and Oak (2007).

This scepticism needs to be visualised in light of Connell's framework, which concords with the hegemonic belief and practice that help-seeking behaviours ought only be considered following unbearable pain or physical injury. In fact, one participant, Simon, accounted to being able to tolerate different pain, shirking away from medical assistance. Similarly, participants in the study by O'Brien et al. (2005), reported their unwillingness to get help with both physical and emotional ailments, unless being of a sexual nature. These findings suggest that being seen as capable of enduring both physical and emotional pain is a key determinant, particularly amongst younger males, of what constitutes masculinity. Seeking medical or psychological support, or even displaying concern about health-related issues, appear to be signs of weakness and cowardice (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010).

The belief that distress can be managed in own way, the perceived lack of impact of emotional trauma and the inability to recognise signs of distress emerged as further help-seeking barriers. Indeed, participants accounted that others need to inform them of changes in behaviours or attitudes resultant from trauma. Additionally, some participants also put forth their beliefs regarding pharmacotherapy, emphasising that this has unwanted and intolerable side-effects. Similar findings have been depicted by Hom et al. (2017), in their systematic review of help-seeking behaviour amongst military personnel.

Having a sound understanding of what the military culture entails, the meaning soldiers place upon their experiences, as well as showing sensitivity to the cultural differences pertaining to this community of individuals, is vital in providing effective professional support (Burgo-Black et al., 2016).

5.4.2 Somebody to Turn To

The importance of a support system emerged from the interviews, although half of the participants were reluctant to seek formal help. Participants preferred turning to their peers, especially those of similar rank. Such preference was similarly reported by Backteman-Erlanson et al. (2011).

Contrasting results were obtained surrounding support from family members. Whereas Raymond highlighted his wife's efforts to balance family matters with his ongoing emotional ordeal, Christopher remarked his avoidance at discussing such matters with his family, so as not to instil concern. Walker et al. (2017) and Brooks et al. (2015) highlight this controversy, with the latter stating that anxiety can surface in family members, after coming to the comprehension of what this job entails. These results hint at the need for further research regarding the interplay between family support and military personnel.

In another instance, two participants remarked feeling more at ease discussing matters with their family doctor. The Maltese community tends to place significant importance upon family doctors, with many locals choosing to utilise the services of one particular family doctor over the span of their lifetime. The tendency for individuals, particularly soldiers, to reach out to primary care services was suggested by Pols and Oak (2007). The importance of having a good primary health

system, capable of dealing with matters of distress and trauma, and making referrals to other services accordingly, emerges from this finding.

The notion of being ordered to seek help versus looking for help out of own free will emerged, especially from Joseph's account. Joseph expressed frustration over having his superior commanding him to do something, which he perceived he can do without. This argument cannot be viewed without taking into consideration the stoicism posed by military culture and the unmasculine appearance, both of which hinder male soldiers from reaching out for support. Furthermore, soldiers at the higher end of the chain of command may portray an attitude of knowing what is best for their subordinates. This is particularly when new services are implemented and the lack of attention given by employees sparks unwanted commands. In this regard, uncertainties arise over the effectiveness of services in cases where soldiers are compelled to attend.

Kim and Morguel (2017) studied the effectiveness of a youth volunteering service, when carried out on both a voluntary and involuntary basis, revealing significant pychological benefits only in the voluntary cohort. Although not related to the effectiveness of professional support systems, this study portrays the ideal approach for effective outcomes. Conversely, one can argue that since military personnel show hesitance in displaying own feelings and seeking support, putting forth a system that ensures the necessary support is pursued, is essential. Bass et al. (2016) posit that rather than commanding soldiers to pursue professional support, it would be wiser for military entities to employ an approach whereby masculine emotions are promoted, individual strengths and limitations are accepted and ideas of weakness, control and self-reliance are addressed. The researchers, thus, promote the accessibility and availability of appropriate information, the recognition of each

individual's unique needs and the encouragement of suitable support systems, vis-a-vis a system controlled by power and domination.

In line with matters of support, ideas with regards to who should be providing such support services were communicated. Most participants displayed their scepticism towards services offered by civil professionals, relating this to civilians' lack of understanding of the military culture. Several participants pointed out that due to the improbability of these services ever being implemented by military personnel, civilian providers ought to have a clear understanding of what comprises the military. This is supported by Kilpatrick et al. (2011), who emphasise the need for sensitivity to the traumatic incidents experienced by these veterans.

Locally, the importance of providing adequate mental health care for military personnel has only been recently recognised. The researcher has come to the knowledge of two entities, one private and one governmental, who are currently providing professional support to veterans, in an environment distinct from the military barracks. In 2019, an alliance of professionals came together to formulate a national emergency response policy aimed at creating a trauma management plan, which focuses on both the response and the recovery of personnel involved in emergency missions. Up until the write-up of this dissertation, this policy was still being developed. The researcher hopes that this policy regards not just the needs of personnel involved in national emergencies, like the civil protection, but also those of the military workforce, whose operations occur on a more frequent basis.

Emergent findings from the literature review and those from this study are depicted in table 5.1. Comparable findings are displayed across each other, making it easier for comparisons to be made.

Table 5.1

Comparison of Findings from Existing Literature with Findings from the Current Study

Findings from research cited in literature review	**Findings from the current study**
- All rescue workers are at an increased risk of developing symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with various factors affecting the various rescue groups (Berger et al., 2012) - An increase in the exposure to traumatic events leads to an increase in stress levels and higher comorbidity rates with other mental disorders (Harvey et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2013; Milligan-Saville et al., 2018; Schwarzer et al., 2016) - Early days of the career being crucial for developing symptoms of emotional trauma (Carey et al., 2013; Kaufmann et al., 2013) - Noticeable physical and psychological challenges following distress (Walker et al., 2017)	Findings from the superordinate theme **"The invisible wounds of pain"**: *1) Psychological suffering* a) The participants reported to experience an array of feelings during a SAR mission, such as hope, fear and frustration. Feelings of guilt were prominent when missions were not successful b) Recollection of events not of a routine nature. Importance of maintaining memories of the specific events also emerged c) First traumatic experience remains immersed in memory d) Psychological distress also arises from own personal battles, such as death of relatives and problems with family members e) Trauma extends from participants onto family members, as relatives have to carry the soldiers' burdens too f) Uncertainty about the future was also evident, particularly in relation to whether such suffering will suffice

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- Departmental conditions being associated with the occurrence of mental health issues (Jones et al., 2018). Brooks et al. (2015) also reported that unclear roles and tasks, increasing demands of the job, inadequate equipment, guilt and self-doubt all have an effect upon mental wellbeing

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2) *A persistent deathtrap*

   a) Unsuitability of some vessels to be used for night missions

   b) Placing self and the crew in danger of losing life

   c) Having to perform missions in perilous weather conditions

   d) Vulnerability of state of mind, caused by long working hours, lack of sleep, extra duties and mental exhaustion. Also, the uncertainty of having actual days off

3) *Organisational distress*

   a) Feelings of being just a number, caused by lack of appreciation and lack of understanding

   b) Lack of new recruits and added tasks implored upon current employees

   c) Sense of responsibility towards junior members of staff

   d) Lack of preparation to deal with actual cases, i.e. theory and practice gap

   e) Becoming involved with the law and having to bear witness to certain incidents

   f) Lack of freedom to make own choices

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- Professional and personal growth being related to diminished intensity of symptoms of PTSD

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Findings from the superordinate theme **"Winds of change"**:

1) *Post-traumatic growth*

   a) Participants made several correlations between the victims and their relatives. This has altered their mindset with regards to life and has made them more aware of the resultant

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(Brooks et al., 2015)	consequence of several actions.
	b) Noticeable changes in self were reported, both positive and negative
	c) Use of reflection to learn and grow as individuals
• The study by Morgan et al. (2017) reported that coping strategies, such as talking to a friend, engaging in a hobby and playing sports were highly regarded amongst their cohort. The presence of stress was inversely related to engaging in pleasurable activities. Similar findings were reported by Carey et al. (2013)	2) *Focusing on coping* a) Most participants reported to making use of various strategies to aide with their distress, such as sports, fishing, music and other risky pastimes
• The need to equip all rescue workers with the skills, knowledge and confidence to work in challenging conditions (Brooks et al., 2015)	b) One participant noted that he can no longer perform his hobby due to the copious number of casualties he recovers
• Adaptive coping strategies being related to an overall better wellbeing (Arble & Arnetz, 2017; Morgan et al., 2017)	c) Faith and maintaining a positive outlook on life were also reported as being positive coping strategies
	d) Coping through increasing professional knowledge and involving self in opportunities that enhance learning, both formal and informal
	3) *Self-satisfaction*
• Knowledge of own capabilities and having confidence in previous successful actions lessen feelings of guilt and uncertainty (Backteman-Erlanson et al., 2011)	a) Desire to do good others was reported by participants as being fulfilled in this job, particularly though the successful accomplishment of SAR missions
	b) When rescues are unsuccessful, participants find consolation in knowing that they have done their best to rescue the casualty

	c) Self-satisfaction was achieved also through formal training abroad
	d) Sense of pride in the job itself and personal fulfilment
• Military and community identity (Walker et al., 2017)	Findings from the superordinate theme **"A distinct language"**: 1) *A community of its own* a) Participants reported to a sense of belonging and comradeship with their squadron, and an association of the squadron to a second family b) The establishment of a comfort zone, which allows soldiers to trust and share concerns with each other 2) *Somebody to turn to*
• Provision of no support is related to an increase in intensity of symptoms (Wang et al., 2011) • Need for formal support (Brooks et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2017)	a) Family remains the most prominent support system, and should also be engaged in professional support b) Only half of the participants were willing to look for alternative forms of support, these being older in age c) One participant reported to feeling more at ease seeking support from family doctor, therefore, the significance of a sound primary health system d) Pursuing support was deemed suitable mainly after being informed by others of a change in personality e) Significance of whoever is providing support to have had previous personal experience of the distress itself and to have a sound knowledge of what the military entails f) Uncertainty as to whether a civil being can truly understand and empathise with a military being

	3) *Barriers to addressing psychological suffering* a) Perceived idea of maintaining good mental wellbeing as being a motive for not seeking professional support b) Being unaware of own suffering, being unwilling to share own experiences with others, fear of being misinterpreted, as well as hesitancy to feel disturbing emotions also appear to be reasons for not dealing with distress c) Participants reported that stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour is evident, as well as lack of information about what constitutes emotional trauma and other forms of mental illness

5.5 Methodological Issues of the Study

The results of this study cannot be viewed without due consideration of various methodological issues, which may have affected the outcomes of this study.

A methodological issue was the participants' imposed participation, which may have created bias, particularly in relation to the experiences narrated by the participants. Conversely, considering the topic and the otherwise small number of participants recruited had participation not been imposed, this strategy appears to have proven ideal in recruiting participants.

The dearth of photographic images captured by the participants hindered the credibility of the study's findings, which was then achieved through substantiating the various viewpoints using a multiple case-study design.

Additionally, the participants were interviewed only once. Conducting a second interview proved to be difficult. Some participants had already exhibited psychological distress during the first interview and finding an appropriate time and date for conducting the interviews proved challenging, mainly due to the volatile nature of their job. Had a second round of interviews been conducted, a vaster and clearer picture of emotional trauma could have been elicited, particularly in cases whereby participants perceived to be lacking emotional trauma.

The following sections will portray the strengths and limitations pertaining to this study.

5.5.1 Strengths

To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first local study to explore the perceptions and impact of emotional trauma upon military personnel with a minimum of five years experience. This study, therefore, can be used as baseline evidence for various professionals within the healthcare and policy-making sectors to plan and implement tailored services that can assist local soldiers in coping with trauma. Furthermore, this study addressed gaps in the literature and brought forth an in-depth explanation of the findings pertaining to quantitative research.

The case study design proved itself ideal in putting into light the complexity of emotional trauma and the burden this carries with it. Such findings would not have been obtained had a quantitative approach been undertaken.

In line with Yin's (2018) indications, this study made use of semi-structured interviews, conducted by the researcher, and photo-elicitation, aiding with triangulation. Through photo-elicitation, the participants chose for themselves the topics for discussion, and thus knew beforehand how the interview will transpire. Additionally, the photographs and transcripts were analysed in conjunction, highlighting the findings supported by both means of data collection methods. Face-to-face interviews also transpired to be a strength, as the researcher could detect various non-verbal cues that became visible throughout.

Another strength was that the study's elements were all conferred to the participants in a meeting or over a phone-call a few weeks prior to the interview, serving a two-fold purpose. All participants were given the opportunity to put forth any queries they had, express their concerns with regards to confidentiality matters, as well as build

trust with the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher had the opportunity to gain a better perspective of the environmental conditions in which the soldiers work and the unpredictable nature of the military's operations. The fact that the participants were chosen from three squadrons, and had various roles and ranks proved to be an additional strength, as various perspectives were obtained, from individuals with differing degrees of trauma.

Conclusively, the number of excerpts included aimed at helping readers gain a better understanding of the soldiers' experiences. Bias arising from personal prejudice and perceptions, particularly when interpreting findings, were reduced through maintaining a reflective diary. This has also widened my perspective surrounding emotional trauma, both as a researcher and a mental health nurse, through embracing findings pertinent to other research and generating new knowledge (Probst, 2015).

5.5.2 Limitations

As a novice researcher, conducting interviews for the first time, proved to be a limitation of this study. A pilot interview was conducted prior to the commencement of this study, to help the researcher gain confidence into the interviewing process. Confidence was gained mainly after the first few interviews, whereby, as a researcher, I became more aware of which prompts to best utilise.

Furthermore, due to matters of confidentiality, female soldiers were not included in this study. This resulted in a homogeneic sample of male participants, who might have given different perspectives of emotional trauma to females, which according to the literature, surrounds mainly sexual trauma. Due to the homogeneity of the sample, this finding could, however, not be divulged.

Moreover, all interviews were conducted in Maltese. Consequently, the excerpts put forth in Maltese were translated into English by the researcher herself. Great effort was made for the translated excerpts to remain true to the original, however, the researcher found that some metaphorical phrases have no matching English version. Thus, all original excerpts were depicted with their corresponding English translation.

Due to the number of interviews conducted, the transcription, translation and analysis phases proved to be time-consuming, with some aspects taking longer to accomplish than was originally planned. Dedicating sufficient time for the comprehensive completion of all phases proved to be challenging, especially in times when I felt overwhelmed by the large amount of data generated. NVivo aided considerably in analysing the transcripts and bringing together the emergent themes from both the interviews and photographic analysis.

Lastly, one may find that transferability of the findings to other military units may not be clear-cut. Locally, only the squadrons under investigation are operational. Thus, findings from the study cannot be generalised to the whole local military. Furthermore, one cannot forget that the role of local operational units varies significantly from that of other countries, whereby the latter focuses mainly on peacekeeping and combat. Indeed, emotional trauma as exhibited by local soldiers cannot be compared to that experienced by combat units in foreign countries, as this tends to be more severe. Conversely, these findings can be compared with that of other vocations carrying work similar to that of Maltese military personnel.

5.6 Conclusion

The present study has provided an in-depth illustration upon the meaning that active military personnel give to emotional trauma, and the lasting impact thereof. Despite acknowledging an array of emotions, the sense of duty and loyalty towards the military prevail. Findings reveal that soldiers maintain characteristic elements of the military, particularly in expressing challenges related to coping with psychological distress and in reaching out for formal support. Furthermore, this study has unveiled several issues within the military that ought to be addressed, with the researcher hoping that this study acts as an eye-opener to the circumstances that add unnecessary burden.

Throughout this chapter, the main findings of the study were firstly outlined in relation to the existing literature, followed by the methodological issues, strengths and limitations of this study. The next chapter will portray an overall summary of this dissertation and recommendations for research, social policy, practice and education.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will commence with a succinct overview of the present study, conducted amongst a cohort of military personnel with at least five years experience working within the field. Realistic recommendations for practice and education, social policy and future research will then be put forth, as based upon the analysis of findings.

6.2 Overview of the Research Study

A vast amount of quantitative literature concerning the prevalence and effects of psychological distress on military personnel in combat zones is being made internationally available (Banducci et al., 2016; Ferrier-Auerback et al., 2010). Conversely, very few studies have been conducted amongst military personnel carrying out SAR duties (Wang et al., 2011), particularly qualitative studies exploring these unique experiences. Locally, researchers have overlooked the military, with only the study by Micallef-Grimaud (2016) taking emotional trauma into consideration. Her study, however, focused upon the resilient factors that aide in coping with distress. It was this lack of local curiosity, as well as my personal experience as a mental health nurse in caring for service members, that inspired the present study.

Consequently, this study aimed at exploring the perception of military personnel surrounding emotional trauma, together with the impact that emotional trauma has upon

their coping capabilities. Thus, this study aimed at contributing to both local and international literature, through embracing a qualitative, case-study design, with semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation being the two means of data collection.

Ten male soldiers were recruited with the aid of three intermediaries from amongst the Ammo and Explosives squadron, Maritime Squadron and Airwing section of the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM). Participants met the inclusion criteria of this study, i.e. having a minimum of five years experience within the field, and being 18 years of age or older. All potential participants were informed beforehand about the study's elements, through a meeting or phone-call. All audio-recorded interviews were conducted within the grounds of each respective squadron at a time and date most suitable for all participants. Thematic analysis, as portrayed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was then utilised to analyse the interviews, whereas photographic imagery was analysed using the guide proposed by Oliffe et al. (2008). NVivo was utilised to aid with the analysis of data and formation of themes. Both within-case analysis and cross-case synthesis were conducted, as recommended by Yin (2018), with the cross-case synthesis yielding three main super-ordinate themes.

Throughout the first super-ordinate theme, *the invisible wounds of pain*, the resultant emotional suffering, the dangerous situational conditions, and various organisational challenges were made explicit. Feelings of guilt, fear and frustration were made evident throughout the narratives. Furthermore, the participants acknowledged that emotional trauma also stemmed from their daily, personal challenges and the knowledge that family members have to share a portion of their own burden. The vulnerable state of mind inflicted upon the soldiers by various organisational characteristics were

considered as significant facets causing additional burden to the already distraught soldiers.

In the second super-ordinate theme, ***winds of change***, the participants recognised their transition from frivolous beings to more mature and conscientious adults, giving due importance to the ongoing process of change itself. Acknowledgements of a change in life's perspective and a heightened awareness of life's pertaining dangers were set forth, as were the participants' increased reflections on various aspects of life, considered as vital for posttraumatic growth. Noteworthy were the coping strategies adopted. Engaging in sports or a pleasurable activity, having faith, maintaining a positive outlook on life and indulging in professional training were considered as the most sought-after adaptive strategies. Conversely, avoidance strategies were more subtly put forth and these included disengagement, social isolation and persistent rumination.

Despite this, barriers limiting the soldiers' will to pursue professional support, including lack of trust, feeling humiliated, need to maintain face value and suppress weakness, perceived mental strength, fear of being misunderstood, and the belief that emotional trauma can be managed by self, were acknowledged. Conversely, the sense of belonging to the military community and the importance of maintaining close relationships and informal support practices between team members were made explicit, bringing to light the ***distinct language*** pertaining to the military. Conclusively, the participants made known their perceptions with regards to supportive entities, highlighting the importance of professionals being familiar with the military culture upon which all military systems worldwide operate.

Findings from this study reveal that although emotional trauma can be uniquely interpreted, the suffering and burden caused by thereof remains mutual. Despite adopting a number of coping strategies, the need for a formal support service, tailored to meet the distinctive needs of military personnel, was exposed.

6.3 Recommendations

In concluding this study, recommendations for practice and education, social policy and management and future research will be presented, as brought forth by the findings of the current study.

6.3.1 Recommendations for Practice and Education

- Within the military, recruit training ought not be focused solely upon the physical aspect and the instillation of discipline, but should include an added training component, focusing upon building emotional resilience and other factors that aid in managing distress. Such a measure will eventually aid rescue workers in lessening the initial shock experienced on their first encounters with distressing events

- Professionals interested in providing formal support, ought to primarily gain previous knowledge of the military culture itself. Thus, these professionals should engage in further education to get a better understanding of the military hierarchy, the chain of command, and the important characteristics that make up the military culture. Workshops designed by the military to instil this knowledge can be means of acknowledging this information, as would be the professionals' involvement in recruit training. Furthermore, these professionals need to show

sensitivity to the different culture that shapes the identity of military personnel and be sentient towards their experiences. Traumatic experiences need to become acknowledged and dealt with in the light of the military culture

- Uncertainty over the services provided by civil professionals was apparent in the participants' accounts. Thus, tailor-made professional services capable of reaching out to military personnel, in which help-seeking behaviour is promoted, the unique needs of each individual are embraced, and issues of weakness and self-reliance are addressed, have to be implemented. On-site psychological services, embracing an open-door policy, whereby military personnel can come forth on a voluntary basis, can also facilitate the provision of professional support and enhance help-seeking behaviour

- Programmes adequately designed to help soldiers manage emotional trauma need to be implemented. These programmes can be conducted over a span of weeks and would include the services of a multi-disciplinary team, aiming at tackling the various aspects of trauma. Sessions can be carried out through the provision of one-to-one therapy or small support groups, using therapeutic measures that can lessen the effects of emotional trauma

- Several participants in this study made it clear that many turn down professional support due to fear of being made fun of. This highlights the importance of maintaining confidentiality during professional support, particularly which soldiers turned up for such service. Moreover, there should be adequate educational and awareness sessions, tailored at reducing hegemonic masculine behaviour. Furthermore, appropriate and adequate information with regards to

mental health issues, as well as signs and symptoms that could indicate the presence of mental illness should be made readily available and accessible, through, for example, the use of online material, leaflets and booklets.

6.3.2 Recommendations for Social Policy and Management

- The participants expressed that the inadequate working conditions and lack of appropriate vessels is an added source of distress. Through observation of the squadrons' premises, it was evident that financial aid to renovate environmental conditions was minimal, highlighting the need for adequate financial investment by governmental entities. Such investment would ensure the provision of an environment that is fit for purpose, in addition to sufficient and suitable vessels, equipped to be utilised in various weather conditions

- The military needs to be promoted further as a career, to address the lack of manpower and reduce the burden and blurring of roles experienced by those already in service. Thus, the military should invest further in human resources and make better use of the manpower available

- The majority of the participants described the risks undertaken when dealing with SAR missions and the unsatisfactory earnings, particularly when carrying out extra duties. Bearing this in mind, the soldiers' income needs to be modified, reflecting more the roles being undertaken and the risks faced. Moreover, a health insurance policy, covering soldiers carrying out SAR missions, needs to be considered

- Since primary health systems remain the most frequented services within the local context, it is imperative for professionals in such services to learn how to recognise symptoms related to psychological distress and make referrals to other services accordingly

- The development of the national emergency response policy is still in its early phases (Cassar, 2019). There need to be more stakeholders, having the wellbeing of all rescue workers at heart, contributing to its development

6.3.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- This study could be further replicated using both a sample of female soldiers and personnel in various ranks, in order to study the difference, if any, in symptom presentation and management

- Quantitative research using validated tools, needs to be carried out on a local level, in order to identify and quantify the number of individuals suffering from mental distress and/or other co-morbid mental illness. Such research could also support the findings of this study with respect to the psychological distress reportedly experienced and the need for increased supportive services

- Additional qualitative research needs to be considered in order to explore the diverse effects of living with emotional trauma upon various elements of life. This will give participants a voice in the planning and implementation of required services

- Both quantitative and qualitative research need also be conducted amongst retired personnel, as the effects of emotional trauma often remain unattended to

after retiring from service and distancing self from colleagues, who might have provided relevant support throughout the career

- Research can also target the effectiveness of the diverse coping mechanisms described by the participants, particularly the long-term impact of avoidance strategies

6.4 Conclusion

This study explored the perception of military personnel on emotional trauma and the impact caused thereby upon both their professional and personal lives. Findings from this study intend to provide professionals working within the mental health field with a sound understanding of the reality behind emotional trauma and the role that the military culture plays hereby. Lastly, this study put forth various recommendations for practice, education, social policy, management and research, in an attempt to help design and plan services that are adequate for soldiers' care.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Search Strategy

Database	Access date	Search strategy	Articles found
Academic Search Complete	13th September 2019	• **Search 1 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" AND "perception*" OR "attitude(s)" OR "opinion(s)" OR "effect(s)" OR "opinion" OR "experience*"	0 results
		• **Search 2 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	277 results
		• **Search 3 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first	119 results

		responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	
		• **Search 4 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war" AND "coping" OR "cop*"	8 results
CINAHL	29th September 2019	• **Search 1 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional	88 results

		stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	
		• Search 2 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	37 results
		• Search 3 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war" AND "coping" OR "cop*"	5 results

		• **Search 4 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war" AND "perception*" OR "attitude(s)" OR "opinion(s)" OR "effect(s)" OR "opinion" OR "experience*"	0 results
Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials	15th October 2019	• **Search 1 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	21 results
		• **Search 2 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first	9 results

		responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)"	
		AND	
		"emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	
		NOT	
		"sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	
		AND	
		"perception*" OR "attitude(s)" OR "opinion(s)" OR "effect(s)" OR "opinion" OR "experience*"	
		• **Search 3 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed**	3 results
		"military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)"	
		AND	
		"emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	
		NOT	
		"sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	
		AND	
		"coping" OR "cop*"	
		• **Search 4 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed**	0 results
		"military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR	

		"search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)"	
		AND	
		"emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	
		NOT	
		"sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	
		AND	
		"perception*" OR "attitude(s)" OR "opinion(s)" OR "effect(s)" OR "opinion" OR "experience*"	
MEDLINE Complete	31st October 2019	• **Search 1 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	167 results
		• **Search 2 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional	79 results

		stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	
		• **Search 3 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war" AND "coping" OR "cop*"	6 results
		• **Search 4 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT	0 results

		"sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war" AND "perception*" OR "attitude(s)" OR "opinion(s)" OR "effect(s)" OR "opinion" OR "experience*"	
PsycINFO	17th November 2019	• **Search 1 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	468 results
		• **Search 2 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	225 results
		• **Search 3 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019;**	30 results

		English language; Peer-reviewed	
		"military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)"	
		AND	
		"emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	
		NOT	
		"sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	
		AND	
		"coping" OR "cop*"	
		• **Search 4 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language; Peer-reviewed**	78 results
		"military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)"	
		AND	
		"emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	
		NOT	
		"sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	
		AND	
		"perception*" OR "attitude(s)" OR "opinion(s)" OR "effect(s)" OR "opinion" OR "experience*"	
PubMed	3rd December	• **Search 1 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019;**	153 results

	2019	**English language** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents"	
		• **Search 2 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war"	75 results
		• **Search 3 limits: Publishing date 2009-2019; English language** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT	4 results

		"sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war" AND "coping" OR "cop*" • **<u>Search 4 limits:</u> <u>Publishing date 2009-2019;</u> <u>English language</u>** "military*" OR "soldier(s)" OR "search and rescue*" OR "first responder(s)" OR "military first responder(s)" AND "emotional trauma" OR "emotional stress" OR "psychological trauma" OR "critical incidents" NOT "sexual trauma" OR "combat" OR "war" AND "perception*" OR "attitude(s)" OR "opinion(s)" OR "effect(s)" OR "opinion" OR "experience*"	10 results

Appendix B: Interview Guide – English and Maltese Versions

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule will follow a semi-structured sequence. The following questions will be asked. Prompts will be included to aid the interview process.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself

   Possible prompts: Age

   How long have you been working for the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM)?

   How can you describe yourself?

2. Why did you join the AFM?

   Possible prompts: Influences from family members or relatives

   Own initiative

   Schooling difficulties

3. Show the series of pictures related to trauma.

   What can you tell me about a particular event?

   Possible prompts: How do these photos relate to this event?

   What feelings and memories do these photos evoke?

   What makes this event so memorable?

4. Why did you choose these particular events/objects/happenings to depict this trauma?

   Possible prompts: Do they act as a reminder?

   Do they symbolize anything?

5. How do you feel you have changed since this traumatic experience?

   Possible prompts: Changes in professional/personal life

   Changes in personal achievements

   Changes in relationships

   Changes in work performance

   Changes in behaviour/routine patterns

6. Show series of photos depicting changes after trauma

   Tell me a bit about these photos.

Possible prompts: What meaning do these photos convey?

What emotions do these photos want to express?

How do you feel about these changes?

7. What, do you believe, are the reasons for such changes?

Possible prompts: The trauma itself

A decrease in self-esteem and self-worth

Having a personality, which can be easily stressed

Lack of social support

Lack of support from the system

No knowledge with regards to the effects of traumatic events

8. Do you feel you needed or still need assistance in managing the trauma and its effects on you? Please explain further

9. What can help you change the way trauma has affected you?

Possible prompts: Psychological help

Medical assistance

Increased awareness and knowledge

More support

10. Under what circumstances would you consider using some of the options just described?

Possible prompts: Feelings of failure

Private versus governmental entities

Through a physician's request

11. Would you view trauma differently if the above solutions were to be implemented?

Possible prompts: Learning opportunity

Challenge for growth

Skeda tal-intervista

L-iskeda tal-intervista ser tieħu xejra semi-strutturali. Il-mistoqsijiet li ġejjin ser jiġu mistoqsija. Ser jingħata anke ħjiel sabiex jgħin fil-proċess tat-tweġibiet.

1. Għidli daqsxejn dwarek innifsek

   Ħjiel: Eta̍

        Kemm ilek taħdem mal-Forzi Armati ta' Malta (AFM)?

        Kif tiddeskrivi lilek innifsek?

2. Għal liema raġuni ingħaqadt mal-AFM?

   Ħjiel: Ġejt influwenzat minn familjari

        Inizzjattiva personali

        Diffikultajiet fl-iskola

3. Uri s-serje ta' ritratti relatati mat-trawma

   X'tista' tgħidli dwar avveniment partikolari?

   Ħjiel: Iddeskrivi kif ir-ritratti jirrelataw ma' dan l-avveniment

        X'memorji u emozzjoni iqanqlu fik dawn ir-ritratti?

        Għalfejn dan l-avveniment jibqa' wiħed memorabili?

4. Għalfejn għazilt dawn l-avvenimenti/oġġetti biex turi din it-trawma?

   Ħjiel: Iservu ta' tifkira?

        Jissimbolizzaw xi ħaġa?

5. Kif tħoss li nbdilt minn mindu esperjenzajt dawn it-trawmiet?

   Ħjiel: Bidliet fil-ħajja professionali/personali

        Bidliet fil-kisbiet personali

        Bidlet fir-relazzjonijiet

        Bidliet fil-mod kif nagħti sehmi fuq ix-xogħol

        Bidliet fl-attitudni/rutina

6. Uri ritratti li juru x'bidliet saru wara dawn l-esperjenzi

   X'tista' tgħidli dwar dawn ir-ritratti?

   Ħjiel: X'messaġġ tixtieq twassal b'dawn ir-ritratti?

   X'emozzjonijiet tixtieq twassal?

   Kif tħossok rigward dawn il-bidliet?

7. Għalfejn, taħseb, saru dawn it-tibdiliet?

   Ħjiel: Minħabba t-trawma nnifisha

   Tnaqqis fl-awto-stima u l-valur li tagħti lilek innifsek

   Personalitàli malajr tiġi stressata

   Nuqqas ta sapport

   Nuqqas ta' sapport mis-sistema

   Nuqqas ta' għarfien rigward l-effetti ta trawma

8. Tħoss li kellek jew għad għandek bżonn ta għajnuna sabiex tnaqqas l-effetti ta trawma fuqek innifsek? Fisser iktar fid-dettall.

9. X'jista' jgħinek tibdel il-mod ta' kif bidluk dawn l-esperjenzi?

   Ħjiel: Assistenza psikoloġika

   Assistenza medika

   Iktar għarfien

   Iktar sapport

10. Taħt liema ċirkustanzi tikkunsidra tuża uħud mill-għażliet li għadna kif semmejna?

    Ħjiel: Sensazzjoni ta' falliment

    Entitajiet privati jew dawk governativi

    Wara talba minn tabib

11. Taħseb li kieku dawn is-soluzzjonijiet kellom jiġu mplimentati, tħares lejn trawma b'mod differenti?

    Ħjiel: Opportunità ta' tagħlim

    Sfida sabiex nikber b'mod personali

Appendix C: Ethical Approval

To be completed by Faculty Research Ethics Committee

We have examined the above proposal and advise

Acceptance   **Refusal**   **Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature   Date 20/6/2019.

To be completed by University Research Ethics Committee

We have examined the above proposal and grant

Acceptance   **Refusal**   **Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature   Date

Appendix D: Covering Letter for AFM

29, Spanjulett

Vanilja Rd

Mġarr MGR 2250

Head Quarters

Armed Forces of Malta

Luqa Barracks

Luqa LQA 4080

31st January 2019

Dear Brigadier J. Curmi,

My name is Janice Agius and I am a mental health nurse currently working at Mount Carmel Hospital. I am presently reading for a Masters degree in Mental Health Nursing with the University of Malta and as part of my course requirements I am conducting a research study entitled, **"The Perception and Impact of Emotional Trauma on Active Military Personnel"**, which will be supervised by Dr Paulann Grech. The aim of this study is to explore how active soldiers interpret their experiences of traumatic events and how these events influence their coping capabilities.

I will be asking participants to capture two series of photographs, one that acts as a reminder of the traumatic experiences, which have influenced various aspects of their lives, and another depicting the changes that this effect has brought about. Participants will be asked not to capture individuals, however, if any individuals are captured in these photos, these must be strictly unidentifiable. An in-depth, audio-recorded interview will be afterwards conducted with the participants. A second interview might be required, to discuss and clarify any salient points raised in the first interview.

Participants will be recruited through an intermediary working within the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM). The intermediary will approach potential participants and explain the nature of this particular study. Contact details of individuals, who have accepted to participate, will then be passed on to me. Participation is voluntary and recruits will be allowed to withdraw from this study, at any point. I am here asking for your permission to access participants within the AFM in the manner described, and to help me identify an individual who can act as an intermediary.

I am also aware that I have to abide to ethical issues, especially those related to informed consent and confidentiality. I will be seeking the approval of the University Research Ethics Committee for the commencement of this study and for ethical clearance.

Your approval to conduct this study would be highly appreciated. Should you require further information about the study, do not hesitate to contact me on 79287794 (email: janice.agius.09@um.edu.mt) or my supervisor Dr Paulann Grech on 23401180 (email: paulann.grech@um.edu.mt).

Yours sincerely,

Janice Agius

Masters in Mental Health Nursing student

Appendix E: Approval from AFM

AFM/2601/000/2010/Vol 20

HEADQUARTERS
ARMED FORCES OF MALTA
Luqa Barracks
Malta

18 February 2019

Ms Janice Agius
29 Spanjulett
Vanilja Road
Mġarr MĠR 2250

Dear Ms Agius,

Reference is made to your letter dated 31 Janary 2019 wherin permission was requested to conduct a research study entitled 'The Perception and Impact of Emotional Trauma on Active Military Personnel'.

Please be informed that the undersigned is granting approval to conduct the research study mentioned above. As soon as you are ready to commence the interviews, kindly inform the undersigned in order to nominate the persons accordingly.

J CURMI
Brigadier
Commander, Armed Forces of Malta

Appendix F: Participant Information Letter

– English and Maltese Version

Participants` Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

My name is Janice Agius and I am currently reading for a Masters degree in Mental Health Nursing at the University of Malta. As part of my course requirements I am conducting a research study entitled, "The Perception and Impact of Emotional Trauma on Active Military Personnel". The aim of this study is to explore how active soldiers interpret traumatic events and how these events influence their coping capabilities. Your participation in this study would be of benefit in helping specialized professionals gain a better understanding about the way military personnel interpret traumatic experiences with regards to the military culture, which they are indoctrinated with, how this has affected their personal and professional lives and the need for ongoing support. Furthermore, all data collected from this research shall be used solely for the purpose of this study.

You are being invited to take two series of photographs, using a device most suitable for you, one of places, objects or occurrences, that remind you of events, which have emotionally impacted aspects of your life, and the other of the changes that this impact has brought about. The photographs will be used as cues to the interview and will be presented in the study report. The photographs need to be taken by the participant him/herself. Ideally, photographs ought not include individuals, however any photographed individuals must not be identifiable. You will then be asked to participate in an interview exploring your experiences of trauma. The interview will take approximately 1 hour and will be held at a time and place most suitable for you. A second interview might be necessary, in which issues raised in the first interview will be clarified and discussed further. You are not obliged to answer all the questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Furthermore, withdrawal from the study will not have any negative repercussions on you and any data collected will be erased. Unless you have any objections, this interview will be audio-recorded and notes might be taken during the interview. I can assure you that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and that your identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research. All data collected will be pseudonymised meaning that the transcripts will be assigned codes and that this data will be stored securely and separately from any codes and personal data. This data may only be accessed by the researcher, the academic supervisor and the examiner(s) for assessment purposes. The coded audio-recordings, transcripts and photos will be

stored on the researcher's personal computer in an encrypted format and material in hard-copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard.
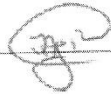
In the event that you feel distressed due to participation in the interview, the service of a healthcare professional, psychologist Dr Michael Galea will be available at no financial cost on your part.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to accept or refuse to take part without giving a reason. A copy of the information sheet and consent form will be provided for future reference. As a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, that implements and further specifies the relevant provisions of said Regulation, to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. Once the study is completed and the results are published, all data collected will be erased.
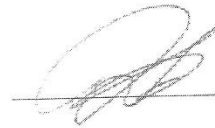
Should you be willing to participate in my study, you are requested to contact the researcher directly on 79287794 or by email janice.agius.09@um.edu.mt.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns do not hesitate to contact me on any of the given details or my supervisor Dr Paulann Grech on 23401180 or paulann.grech@um.edu.mt.

Yours Sincerely,

Janice Agius

Researcher

Paulann Grech

Research Supervisor

Formula ta' informazzjoni għall-Parteċipanti

Għażiż/a Parteċipant/a

Jiena Janice Agius, fil-preżent qed insegwi Masters fis-Saħħa Mentali ġewwa l-Universita' ta' Malta. Bħala parti mir-rekwiżiti tal-kors, qed nagħmel riċerka bit-titlu, "Il-Perċezzjoni u l-Impatt ta' Trawma Psikoloġika fuq Membri Attivi tal-Militar". L-għan ta' dan l-istudju hu li nesplora kif is-suldati jinterpretaw esperjenzi trawmatiċi u kif dawn jaffettwaw il-kapaċitajiet tagħhom sabiex jaffaċċjawhom. Is-sehem tiegħek f'dan l-istudju jista' jgħin biex bħala professjonisti jkollna aktar għarfien dwar kif is-suldati jħarsu lejn esperjenzi trawmatiċi fil-kuntest tal-kultura militari, li tiġi mnissla fihom, kif dawn l-esperjenzi qegħdin jaffettwawlhom il-ħajja personali u professjonali tagħhom, u dwar il-ħtieġa ta' iktar sapport kontinwu. Kull informazzjoni miġbura tintuża biss għall-għan jew l-għanijiet ta' dan l-istudju.

Bħala parteċipant/a inti se tintalab tieħu żewġ settijiet ta' ritratti b'mezz l-iktar konvenjenti għalik; sett ta' postijiet, oġġetti jew avvenimenti li jfakkruk f'esperjenzi li ħallew impatt fuq ħajtek u sett ieħor tal-bidliet li dan l-impatt ġab miegħu. Ir-ritratti ser jintużaw bħala għajnuna waqt l-intervista u ser jiġu ppreżentati fir-rapport finali. Ir-ritratti iridu jiġu meħuda mil-parteċipant/a nnifsu/nnifisha. Idealment, ir-ritratti ma jkunux jinkludu terzi persuni. Minn naħa l-oħra, jekk jiġu jidhru xi individwi miġbuda fir-ritratti, dawn ma jistgħux ikunu identifikabbli. Inti imbagħad ser tintalab tieħu sehem f'intervista sabiex nesploraw l-esperjenzi tiegħek dwar dawn it-trawmiet. L-intervista se tieħu madwar siegħa u ssir f'post u f'ħin li jkun konvenjenti għalik. Jista' jkun hemm bzonn ta' intervista oħra, fejn jiġu kklarifikati u diskussi iktar, ċertu punti mqajjma fl-ewwel intervista. M'intix obbligat/a li twieġeb il-mistoqsijiet kollha u tista' twaqqaf l-intervista fi xħin trid mingħajr ma tagħti l-ebda raġuni. Dan mhux ħa jkollu riperkussjonijiet negattivi fuqek u l-informazzjoni li tinġabar minn għandek titħassar. Sakemm m'għandek l-ebda oġġezzjoni, din l-intervista se tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo, filwaqt li xi noti jistgħu jiġu meħuda waqt l-intervista. Nassigurak li se tinżamm il-kunfidenzjalità matul l-istudju kollu u l-identità tiegħek u kull informazzjoni personali miġbura mhumiex se jiġu żvelati mkien fit-teżi, ir-rapporti, il-preżentazzjonijiet u/jew il-pubblikazzjonijiet li jistgħu jirriżultaw minnha. Kull tagħrif miġbur se jiġi psewdonomizzat, jiġifieri it-traskrizzjonijiet kollha se jkunu protetti permezz ta' sistema ta' kodiċi u miżmuma separatament mill-informazzjoni personali. Ir-riċerkatur/ir-riċerkatriċi, is-superviżur/a akkademiku/a u l-eżaminatur/i biss ser ikollhom aċċess għall-informazzjoni miġbura u dan bi skop ta' verifika. L-awdjo rrekordjat, it-traskrizzjonijiet u r-

ritratti se jinħażnu fuq il-kompjuter personali tar-riċerkatur/riċerkatriċi b'mod kriptat. Barra minn hekk, il-materjal stampat se jinqafel f'post sigur.
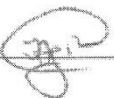
F'każ li tħoss li l-intervista ħolqitlek diffikultà u tixtieq li tiddiskuti x'qed tħoss ma' professjonista mill-qasam tal-kura tas-saħħa, il-psikologu Dr Michael Galea se jkun qed jipprovdi servizz ta' għajnuna mingħajr ħlas min-naħa tiegħek.

Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju hija għażla għal kollox volontarja u inti ħieles jew ħielsa li taċċetta jew tirrifjuta li tieħu sehem mingħajr ma jkun hemm konsegwenzi fil-konfront tiegħek. Se tingħata kopja tal-ittra ta' informazzjoni u tal-formola ta' kunsens sabiex tkun tista' taċċessahom fil-futur. Barra minn hekk, skont l-Att Dwar il-Protezzjoni u l-Privatezza tad-Data, li jimplimenta u jispeċifika id-diżpożizzjonijiet relevanti ta'dan l-Att, inti għandek id-dritt li taċċessa, temenda u tħassar kull informazzjoni li tikkonċernak. L-informazzjoni personali kollha se titħassar hekk kif jintemm dan l-istudju ta' riċerka u jkunu ppubblikati r-riżultati miksuba.
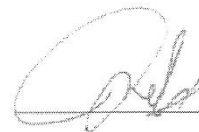
F'każ li tkun interessat li tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju, int mitlub tikkuntattja direttament lir-riċerkatriċi billi ċċempilli fuq 79287794 jew tibgħatli email fuq janice.agius.09@um.edu.mt.

Grazzi ħafna tal-ħin u s-sehem tiegħek f'dan l-istudju. F'każ li jkollok xi mistoqsijiet jew tixtieq tiċċara xi ħaġa, tista' tikkuntattjani fuq id-dettalji tiegħi li ġew mogħtija lilek. Tista' wkoll tikkuntattja lis-superviżura Dr Paulann Grech fuq 23401180 jew billi tibgħat email fuq paulann.grech@um.edu.mt.

Dejjem tiegħek,

_____   _____

Janice Agius   Paulann Grech

Riċerkatriċi   Superviżura tar-riċerka

Appendix G: Psychologist Agreement Letter

February 2019

Psychologist Agreement

I, the undersigned, declare that the research study "The perception and impact of emotional trauma on active military personnel", conducted by the researcher Ms Janice Agius, was explained to me in detail by the named researcher. As a professional psychologist, I understand that some participants might experience psychological distress during the interview, for which support may be required. In view of this, I will be offering my counselling services to whomever may be referred, at no financial costs to the participants or researcher.

Name of researcher:	Janice Agius
Contact details:	79287794
Email address:	Janice.agius.09@um.edu.mt

Name of supervisor:	Dr Paulann Grech
Contact details:	23401180
Email address:	Paulann.grech@um.edu.mt

Name of psychologist:	Dr Michael Galea
Contact details:	79551651

Signature:	
Date of agreement:	28-02-2019

Appendix H: Participant Consent Form –

English and Maltese Version

<u>Participants` Consent Form</u>

"The Perception and Impact of Emotional Trauma on Active Military Personnel"

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Janice Agius. The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study and all questions have been answered.
2. I understand that I am required to take two sets of photographs with a device of my own choosing. The photographs need to be taken by myself. The photographs ought not include individuals, however, if any individuals are photographed, these are not to be identifiable.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview, in which the researcher will ask questions to explore how soldiers interpret traumatic events and how these influence their coping capabilities.
4. I am aware that the interview will take approximately 1 hour. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
5. I am aware that this interview will be audio recorded and transcribed (written down as it has been spoken) and that notes might be taken.
6. I am aware that the transcripts will be coded and that this data will be stored securely and separately from any codes and personal data.
7. I am aware that the researcher, academic supervisor and examiners are the only persons who have access to this data for verification purposes.
8. I am also aware that the coded audio-recordings, transcripts and photos will be stored on the researcher`s personal computer in an encrypted format and material in hard-copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard and kept until results are published.
9. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.
10. I also understand that I am free to accept, refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason. This will have no negative repercussions on myself and that any data collected form me will be erased anonymously.
11. I also understand that my contribution will be of benefit in raising awareness on the sensitivity of distressing events and how such events affect the lives of military personnel.

12. If I feel that the interviews have distressed me in any way, psychologist Dr Michael Galea will be available to provide a service at no financial costs on my part.

13. I understand that under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, that implements and further specifies the relevant provisions of said Regulation, I will have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable ask for the data concerning me to be erased.

14. I also understand that once the study is completed and results are published, all data will be erased.

15. I will be provided with a copy of the information letter and consent form for future reference.

16. I have read and understood the points and statements of this form. I have had all the questions answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.

Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Janice Agius	Paulann Grech
Researcher	Research Supervisor
Janice.agius.09@um.edu.mt	Paulann.grech@um.edu.mt
79287794	23401180

Formula ta' kunsens tal-Parteċipanti

"Il-Perċezzjoni u l-Impatt ta' Trawma Psikoloġika fuq Membri Attivi tal-Militar"

Jien, hawn taħt iffirmat/a, nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex nieħu sehem fl-istudju mmexxi minn Janice Agius. L-għan ta' dan id-dokument hu li jiġu speċifikati t-termini tal-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi f'dan l-istudju ta' riċerka.

1. Jien ingħatajt informazzjoni miktuba u verbali dwar l-għan tal-istudju u l-mistoqsijiet kollha twieġbu.

2. Nifhem li ser niġi bżonn nieħu żewġ settijiet ta' ritratti b'mezz l-iktar konvenjenti għalija. Ir-ritratti iridu jiġu meħuda minni personali. Ir-ritratti m'għandhomx jinkludu terzi persuni. Minn naħa l-oħra, jekk jiġu jidhru xi individwi miġbuda fir-ritratti, dawn ma jistgħux ikunu identifikabbli.

3. Nifhem li se nkun qed nipparteċipa f'intervista, fejn ir-riċerkatur jew ir-riċerkatriċi ħa tesplora kif is-suldati jinterpretaw esperjenzi trawmatiċi u kif dawn jaffettwaw il-kapaċitajiet tagħhom sabiex jaffaċċjawhom.

4. Naf li l-intervista se tieħu madwar siegħa. Nifhem, li l-intervista se ssir f'post u ħin konvenjenti għalija.

5. Jien konxju/a li din l-intervista se tkun qed tiġi rrekordjata permezz ta' tagħmir tal-awdjo u se ssir traskrizzjoni (jiġifieri kitba ta' dak li ntqal kelma b'kelma fl-intervista), kif ukoll li jistgħu jittieħdu xi noti mir-riċerkatriċi waqt l-intervista.

6. Naf ukoll li se ssir kodifikazzjoni tat-traskrizzjonijiet u dawn se jinżammu separatament mill-informazzjoni personali.

7. Naf ukoll li r- riċerkatriċi, is-superviżura akkademika u l-eżaminaturi huma l-uniċi persuni li se jkollhom aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni għal skop ta' verifika.

8. Barra min hekk, naf li l-awdjo rrekordjat, it-traskrizjonijiet u r-ritratti se jinħażnu fuq il-kompjuter personali tar- riċerkatriċi b'mod kriptat. Barra minn hekk, naf li l-materjal stampat se jitqiegħed f'post sikur u se jinżamm sakemm joħorġu r-riżultati.

9. Naf li l-identità tiegħi u l-informazzjoni personali mhuma se jinkixfu mkien fit-teżi, fir-rapporti, fil-preżentazzjonijiet u/jew fil-pubblikazzjonijiet li jistgħu jirriżultaw minnha.

10. Nifhem ukoll li jien liberu/a li naċċetta, nirrifjuta jew inwaqqaf il-parteċipazzjoni f'kull ħin bla ma nagħti raġuni. Dan mhux ħa jkollu riperkussjonijiet negattivi fuqi.

Nifhem ukoll li la darba nirtira minn dan l-istudju, l-informazzjoni miġbura se titħassar.

11. Nifhem ukoll li l-kontribuzzjoni tiegħi tista' sservi ta' benefiċċju biex jiżdied l-għarfien dwar il-perċezzjoni ta' esperjenzi trawmatiċi u x'impatt qegħdin iħallu fuq is-suldati.

12. Madanakollu, jekk inħoss li l-intervisti ħolquli diffikultà u nixtieq li niddiskuti x'qed nħoss, naf li l-psikologu, Dr Michael Galea se jkun qed jipprovdi servizz ta' għajnuna mingħajr ħlas min-naha tiegħi.

13. Nifhem ukoll, li skont l-Att Dwar il-Protezzjoni u l-Privatezza tad-Data, li jimplimenta u jispeċifika id diżpożizzjonijiet relevanti ta'dan l-Att, jien għandi dritt li naċċessa, nemenda u nħassar kull informazzjoni li tikkonċernani.

14. Naf ukoll li meta jintemm l-istudju u r-riżultati jkunu ppubblikati, l-informazzjoni miġbura titħassar.

15. Fl-aħħar nett, naf ukoll li se ningħata kopja tal-ittra ta' informazzjoni u tal-formula ta' kunsens sabiex inkun nista' naċċessahom fil-futur.

16. Jien qrajt u fhimt il-punti u d-dikjarazzjonijiet f'din l-formula. Inħossni sodisfatt/a bit-tweġibiet li ngħatajt għall-mistoqsijiet li kelli, u qed naċċetta minn jeddi li nipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju.

Parteċipant/a:_____

Firma:_____

Data:_____

Janice Agius
Riċerkatriċi
Janice.agius.09@um.edu.mt
79287794

Paulann Grech
Superviżura tar-riċerka
Paulann.grech@um.edu.mt
23401180

Appendix I: Intermediary Agreement Letter

29, Spanjulett

Vanilja Rd,

Mġarr MGR2250

March 2019

RE: "The Perception and Impact of Emotional Trauma on Active Military Personnel"

Dear Mr/Ms *(name and surname of intermediary)*,

My name is Janice Agius, a mental health nurse, currently working at Mount Carmel Hospital. At the moment I am reading for a Masters degree in Mental Health Nursing and as part fulfilment of this course, I am conducting a study entitled "The Perception and Impact of Emotional Trauma on Active Military Personnel", supervised by Dr Paulann Grech. This research will look at how active soldiers interpret their experiences of traumatic events and how these events influence their coping capabilities.

The study will entail two parts. In the first part, participants will be asked to capture two sets of photos, one depicting objects/occurrences and places that act as a reminder of the traumatic events, which have left an impact on their lives. The other set of photos will capture any changes that these experiences have brought about. Participants will then be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview, which will last about one hour, in which the experiences of these traumas will be further discussed. A second interview might be necessary, in which issues raised in the first interview will be clarified and discussed further. Interviews will be audio-recorded and notes might be taken during the interview.

For this study, I will be requiring between six and ten participants, who will be willing to contribute to both parts of the study. The participants must be males, and working in the Ammo and Explosive Squadron, Air Wing and Maritime Squadron within the Armed Forces of Malta. Recruits must also have at least 5 years' experience working within the field. I am requesting your assistance as an intermediary, in approaching potential

participants to explain the nature of this study. In addition, I am asking you to provide each participant with an information letter, explaining the nature of this study. Participation is strictly voluntary. Any participants willing to contribute to the study are invited to contact the researcher directly on either of the below methods. The data collected from this study will be used solely for research purposes and only the researcher, supervisor and examiner(s) will have access to it. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout data collection and data analysis. All data collected will be erased once the study is completed. It is estimated that data collection will take place between the months of July 2019 and November 2019.

I am aware that I have to strictly adhere to ethical guidelines, especially those relating to informed consent and confidentiality and that I have to consult my supervisor Dr Paulann Grech, throughout the research process. Prior to the commencement of this study, I will be also seeking approval from the University Research Ethics Committee.

Your support for this research study is highly appreciated. Should you require further information or any clarifications with regards to the study, do not hesitate to contact me on 79287794 or by email on janice.agius.09@um.edu.mt or my supervisor Dr Paulann Grech on 23401180 or by email on paulann.grech@um.edu.mt.

Thank you in advance

Yours sincerely,

Janice Agius

Researcher

Appendix J: Within-Case Analysis

1 Matthew's Case

Matthew and I met in a conference room on the premises of one of the mentioned squadrons. I immediately noticed a stark contrast between the hectic working environment and the sense of discipline and respect amongst the employees. Despite being busy, all were very welcoming and I could feel a sense of calmness in that particular location. I was also taken aback by the eagerness of this participant to engage in the interview. Matthew eventually admitted that he had never spoken to anyone about his experiences. Nevertheless, he never clarified whether this was due to him being unwilling to discuss these issues or whether he was never given the opportunity to do so.

Right at the start of the interview, Matthew's character emerged. He admitted to being a highly energetic person, who uses physical activity to exploit this energy and cope with daily stressors. He further chose to speak about his enthusiasm to engage in further learning. Matthew acknowledged the learning opportunities, both local and foreign, that the AFM presents to its members and the necessity to keep updated with the latest technology and terminology. I then asked him to present the photographs he had captured.

Through the first image (image 1), Matthew reflected upon what he considered to be one of the most emotional search and rescue (SAR) missions he ever carried out. He recounted the incident in detail, and how impressed he became when he realised that the victim had tried to save himself at the face of death. This mission had a lasting effect, with Matthew admitting primarily that he had restless nights and ruminations about the incident. He further admitted that he still keeps the newspaper, which had published this

incident. Only when challenged did he reflect on reasons as to why he might want to maintain memories of such a tragic incident.

Image 1

Ferry Terminal

Image 2, which depicts two of the SAR boats operated by the AFM, represents what Matthew considers as being a very vast picture. He reflects on these boats as being representative of both the highlights and the pitfalls of his career, particularly of events which he claimed had given him the chills. He recounts three different events related to this image, revealing the dangers to which they are continuously exposed.

Image 2

Search and Rescue Boats

For the last image (image 3), Matthew chose to expose a different part of himself, and decided to discuss familial issues, which have also left an impact upon his life. In particular, he contemplates upon the death of his father, whom he had a very close relationship with, and narrates the day when he found his father dead in his household. Matthew admits that this event has left a huge impact and has also affected the way he, himself handles and feels towards dead bodies. Lastly, he also acknowledged the psychological difficulties that this had brought about and his personal struggles towards remaining mentally strong.

Image 3

Bed

The interview then focused on the impact that these situations have left. Matthew appeared to be very insightful as to the changes that these brought about. He admitted to becoming more aware of various dangers and to assessing his surroundings more often. Other highlights which emerged from this interview focused on the persistent stigma concerning issues of mental health and possible organisational consequences surrounding help-seeking behaviours.

Three themes emerged from Matthew's interview:

i) Personal struggles

ii) Exposure to risk

iii) Coping with stress

The next sections will portray an in-depth analysis of each theme individually.

1.1 Personal Struggles

This theme brings to light the personal intricacies that add to the trauma experienced through the job. A topic which frequently came up during the interview was the impact that Matthew's father's death caused. The death of his father provoked surprising reactions. Matthew confessed to experiencing feelings of uneasiness prior to discovering his father's body, mainly uneasiness at not knowing how serious the situation at the time was. He later describes having gone through both grief and shock when he realised that his father had passed away. He describes his feelings as follows:

"... bla saħħa ġejt ee jiġifieri, jiġifieri, erm, dik hi l-kelma, bla saħħa u titfixkel ... U ħriġt ngħajjat qisni miġnun hux ... u nibki jiġifieri..." (lines 295-299)	I suddenly had no strength, erm, that's it, I had no strength and I became confused … And I went out running and shouting like a mad person … and crying too

The aftermath of this event was not easy for Matthew to experience. His narrative exposes a crave to keep his father in mind, especially through the ownership of his father's household, which brings pleasant recollections of past experiences. Matthew recounts that his household acts as a recollection of the bond which they shared later on in life, as can be seen in the next excerpt:

"... illum-il-ġurnata l-post żammejtu jiena ... għandi memorji sbieħ fih, jiġifieri, meta morna narawh, meta mlieħ bl-għamara, per eżempju, fhimt? Erm...kont narah jitbissem hemm..." (lines 342-346)	Nowadays, I own his place … I have happy memories of the place, when we visited the place for the first time, when he furnished it, for example. Erm… I used to see him smiling there

Notwithstanding, this experience also triggered an array of emotions. Despite Matthew not giving details as to what surpassed through him, he associated this difficult

time to a war, which must be continually fought, in order to be won. His narrative and imagery (image 3) also suggest that he still struggles with the death of his father. His account hints that Matthew still ponders about his father's death, and is also able to recollect the shock he experienced that day:

"Biss pero' trid tiġġildilha l-biċċa ee… ġlieda enormi, erm. Dik hi, ġlieda enormi. Anke tara affarijiet ifakkruk fih… fil-bidu, fil-bidu qisni, ma ridtx nara affarijiet ifakkruni fih… imma llum-il-ġurnata, erm … imma dik is-sodda, x'ħin naraha u nidħol f'dik il-bedroom, nibqa' nħoss dak ix-xokk ee." (lines 359-364)

However, you need to fight back… it's a massive fight. That's it, a massive fight. Even certain objects remind me of him … at the beginning, at the beginning kind of, I did not want to see anything that reminded me of him … but nowadays, erm … but that bed, as soon as I see it and go into that bedroom, I still experience a sense of shock

1.2 Exposure to Risk

The dangerous and unstable nature of the job was indirectly made reference to by Matthew through the narratives of incidents, accomplished during bad weather. Matthew explains that despite not being the norm, the presence of perilous weather conditions almost always results in a SAR mission. Matthew mentions the danger they encounter at various points, especially by making reference to one particular mission. He explains the challenges that were prominent during that mission and his fears that the crew may end up in danger themselves:

"… dak kien force 9 … u letteralment biex… kif inzilna ġo dis-safety boat konna, qisna ee magħluqa… u dis-safety boat ħa tinqeleb, ma tinqelibx…" (lines 424-425)

It was force 9 … and literally, as soon as we got down into the safety boat, we were like erm … it's enclosed ... it was going to topple over

His narrative hints that exposure to risk occasionally instils doubt and also acts as a reminder that his own family would be deeply impacted if something had to happen to

him. Matthew acknowledged this danger and stated (lines 400 and 416) several times *"... qiegħed ġol-periklu hawn..."* (I am at risk over here). He further chose to graphically describe one particular hazard he had to tackle, all the while admitting to the harm that could have been imposed upon himself. A section of this description is given below:

"... li kieku ma nafx kif fettilli ġo moħħi, x'ħin rajt il-lanċa qed iddur, ma qbiżtx għal hawn fuq, kieku mgħaffeġ jien. Letteralment mgħaffeġ, u l-fender, bl-impatt, ġera, il-ħabel iċċaqlaq minn mar-railing, u kelli jdejja, u kelli l-ingwanti... ingwanti tagħna jiġifieri, apposta ... istra u jaqbadli s-subgħa ż-żgħir u jiġbdu... jiġbidha l-ingwanta. L-ingwanta tibqa' hemm u l-ħabel dar... kien subgħajja, ma nafx x'kien jigri minnu ..." (lines 409-415)

Hadn't I known what went through my mind as soon as I saw the boat topple over, hadn't I jumped over here, I would be squashed. Literally squashed, and with the impact, the boat fender moved, the rope shifted from the railing, and my hands were, I had the gloves on … our gloves, that is, used purposely … and it got hold of my small finger and pulled it … pulled the glove. The glove remained in place and the rope just turned around it… I don't know what would have become of my finger had it been there

Nonetheless, it appears that Matthew remains adamant to this risk, especially when considering the satisfaction and pride associated with each successful mission. He proudly refers to these as rewards and also gives the impression that feelings associated with a sense of good feel surpass all hardships encountered during the missions. He substantiates this view through image 2, which represents both the hardships and rewards encountered on an almost daily basis:

"... imma mbagħad sodisfazzjon hux, għax din li ma nizzilnijiex aħna, min kien ħa jniżżilha (l-anzjana)? ... Dak kien, kien reward. Għandi iktar rewards ta jiġifieri, imma ġo moħħi dak wieħed mit-top 3." (lines 438-442)

There's a sense of satisfaction, because had it not been for us, who would have brought her to shore (referring to an old lady)? … That was a reward. I have many more rewards, but in my mind that is one of the top three

1.3 Coping with Stress

The coping mechanisms adopted by Matthew in dealing with distress were also prominent during the interview. Matthew admitted to using sports as a means of dealing with stress. He illustrated this particularly when describing how he dealt with his father's death. This method can also be regarded as a means of escaping from reality, in that it allows an individual to shift the focus upon the sports being performed at the time, as well as the personal progress and development in that sports. This mechanism was depicted in the following:

"… biss pero jien imbagħad, jiena s'issa, ħa ngħidu hekk, nipprova overcome qisu, qisu things, taf kif? Jiġifieri jekk, oġġett, jiena naf li għandi dwejjaq ġo rasi, jiġifieri, x'ħa nagħmel, mill-ewwel, biex intaffi? Jien l-isports il-fejqan tiegħi jiġifieri… anke dakinhar tal-funeral stess filgħodu, qomt fis-sitta ta filgħodu, mort nitrenja, mort niġri, mort bir-rota ġifieri, jiena nipprova… jien strong fil-verita…" (lines 348-353)	Up until now, I have always tried to overcome things, you know? So, if something, if I know I'm feeling low, what am I going to do to relieve myself? Sports is my medicine… even on the day of the funeral, I had woken up at six in the morning, and I went to train, I went running, I went cycling, so I try… in reality I am strong

In contrast with this healthy perception of dealing with stress, Matthew also admitted to having at times wished to engage in maladaptive coping strategies, particularly smoking. He recounts that he has only experienced this once and states:

"… jien ma npejjipx, qisni kelli ġo moħħi dak il-ħin biex tirrilexja… nixtieq inpejjep sigarett, taf kif? Qisek tieħu break, taf kif?" (lines 434-437)	I don't smoke, however at that point, a thought passed through my mind, to relax … I'd like to smoke a cigarette, you know? To kind of take a break

Nevertheless, it appears that Matthew has a good consideration of what being mentally healthy entails. In fact, he regards mental health as being a personal battle, which only the individual can make sense of. He further posits that only the individual

knows what is best personally and emphasises the need to do what is necessary to cope with trauma. Furthermore, Matthew acknowledges that he does his utmost to look after his mental wellbeing, and tries to engage in behaviours that can enhance this:

"Inti ġo moħħok ħadd ma jista' jidhol… inti trid tmexxih moħħok. Jiġifieri, jekk inti taf li tazza birra ħa tagħmillek il-ġid, ħa tmur għal tazza barra. Jekk inti taf li tqatta' l-ħin mal-familja ħa tagħmillek il-ġid… Tagħmel l-affarijiet li inti tħobb tagħmel hux" (lines 384-387)	No one can get into your mind … you have to lead it forward. So, if you know that a glass of beer would be beneficial, you'd take the glass of beer. If spending time with your family is beneficial … you do whatever you like to do

In conclusion, Matthew acknowledges the benefits that can surface through talking therapy. Throughout the last part of the interview, Matthew praised the idea of having someone to talk to. Despite admitting to having never reached out for help, he clearly stated that he would find no objection in getting support. Indeed, he explains the following:

"U oġġett illi jgħinek biex tfieq… li titkellem. Li inti, erm, ma toqgħodx taħbi…" (lines 505-506)	And it's something which helps you heal… talking. That you, erm, don't shy away

2 Alan's Case

When Alan and I met, he immediately informed me of his position concerning his participation. Alan admitted that both his personal and professional lives had taken up too much of his time, for him to think about capturing any images that reminded him of trauma. Furthermore, he stated that he did not feel like participating, but was only doing it out of good will.

Alan started off by acknowledging the working experience and the learning opportunities that the AFM has provided him with, particularly in attending courses in

foreign countries. I instantly detected a fondness for his country, which was later expressed in several arguments surrounding illegal migration. Feelings of anger and frustration were prominent during these arguments and Alan acknowledged that he would rather save the life of a local citizen, rather than a foreigner. After indulging further, Alan admitted that these feelings arose after various hazardous encounters and occasional unacceptable and threatening behaviour from illegal immigrants. Alan claimed that there were instances whereby these would be armed and would at times threaten the rescuers to take them to a designed place or country. Conversely, it appeared that these situations did not leave a marked disturbance in Alan's life, rather, have increased his sense of patriotism for the country.

Alan remarked that only a few instances have left an impact. These included situations whereby a Maltese citizen had to be saved, instances which involved children and occasions during which his professional trade was put on the line. In the latter example, Alan admitted to being a perfectionist and expects self to carry out his job precisely. Thus, occasions which have caused him to make a mistake are taken personally, damaging his mental wellbeing. In relation to the first two examples, Alan narrated various accounts in which he was involved. Particularly, he recounted the story of two migrant children who lost their mother during the rescue. He also recognised that this impact is due to an association which he makes with his own children, especially after considering the vulnerable state of these rescued children.

The interview then focused on help-seeking, with Alan acknowledging that he feels no shame in seeking professional support. He further stated that he prefers to get assistance from relatives first, especially his wife, and would only seek support if the

problem persists. In addition, Alan declared that he does his utmost to help others. He recounts his personal experience of dealing with a problematic sibling and of always being willing to assist those in need. Lastly, Alan differentiates between the assistance offered by the military itself, and that by civil entities, concluding that civil organisations cannot be the sole means of support, as they have no recognition and knowledge of what the military culture entails.

Three themes were identified in this narrative:

i)   Recurrent associations

ii)   A changing self

iii)   Healing through support

The themes will be separately analysed below.

2.1 Recurrent Associations

This theme identifies instances, whereby Alan associates victims with members of his family, particularly his children. He states that episodes which remind him of these children include, when someone, or the media mentions that children were rescued off the coasts of Malta. Alan admits to having sporadic recollections of these incidents, through the following:

"Meta nkun id-dar, nisma' każ ta' immigranti, ġieli jiġuni flashes ta' tfal…" (line 331)	When I am at home, and someone mentions a case in which illegal immigrants are involved, sometimes I do get flashbacks of children

Alan's narrative suggests that he was deeply affected by one particular case, during which a woman had given the participant her child, so as to prevent him from drowning. He later commented that the mother had died a few minutes later. Alan

acknowledges a frequent flashback related to this incident and states that he tends to

associate these children with his own. He explains:

"... dik (għall-flashback), ta' meta erfajt dak it-tifel tiġini ħafna, flash... Ngħid iwa, ngħid darba sal... salvajt, fil-brackets, dak it-tifel... imsieken, jistgħu jmutu, għax huma fraġli iktar minn adult ... kif nisma', każ ta' immigrant, fejn hemm it-tfal, nibda niftakar f'events fejn, jew kien hemm it-trabi għadhom jitwieldu, tgħid ara jaħasra ... jiġik f'moħħok hekk, speċi, tgħid, imn'alla konna aħna li salvajnihom, jew illum kieku minjaf kif qegħdin... nikkumparahom ħafna ma tiegħi, iwa, kemm ilu li kelli t-tfal, xi ħaġa awtomatika..." (lines 335-350)	I experience that (referring to the flashback), of when I saved that child, very frequently… I acknowledge it and say once I saved, in brackets, that child … poor beings, they can easily die, because they are more vulnerable than adults ... when I hear a case in which child immigrants are involved, I remember events whereby children would have just been born, and you feel sorry for them… it passes through your mind, to say, thank God we saved them, or who knows in which circumstances they would be in today … I do compare them to my own, yes, since having my own children, it comes automatically

Alan acknowledges feeling distressed when experiencing events in which

children are involved. He makes statements acknowledging the vulnerability of said

population, and the continuous reminder of his own daughter:

"X'ħin nara tifel f'diffikulta', jew tifla f'diffikulta', nimmaġina lit-tifla tiegħi. Ħadd ma' jrid lit-tfal tiegħu fil-periklu ..." (lines 271-272)	When I see a child in difficulty, I imagine my own daughter. No one wants his children to be at risk

That said, Alan mentions how these experiences have caused him to change.

These changes will be portrayed in the following theme.

2.2 A Changing Self

As previously noted, the repeated exposure of Alan to distressing events have

caused him to change. Change was determined to be related mostly to an increase in

consciousness and an altered mindset. Having experienced situations in which he was

threatened and put at risk, Alan explains how he tends to be apprehensive even when not at work:

"Sirt iktar kawt, speċjalment meta noħroġ, noħroġ mal-familja, naqra moħħni hemm ta' x'inhu jiġri, min għandi madwari." (lines 549-550)	I have become more cautious when I go out, when I go out with my family, I am more alert to what is happening and whom I have around me

Alan also recognises that this change in self occurred over a number of years. Conversely, he does not divulge into whether this change was brought about because of aging maturity or due to the experiences being discussed.

"... f'sitta, seba' snin, kemm jiġu? Inbidlet il-mentalita' tiegħi, kompletament…" (lines 487-488)	Six, seven years, how many? My mentality has changed, completely

Unknowingly, this interview may have also caused the participant to reflect upon the issues being discussed, bringing to light other emotions and thoughts not previously identified. In fact, in line 488, Alan states *"… qed iġġibni inse' inti…"* (You have just made me realise this). Later on, Alan reiterated this statement and commented:

"...ċertu affarijiet irrealizajthom issa, kemm ilni nitkellem miegħek." (lines 650-651)	I have just realised certain things, since I started talking to you

Notwithstanding, this realisation might have prompted Alan to reflect on instances not discussed in this interview. However, since a follow-up interview was not possible, the outcome of such a reflection remains unknown.

2.3 Healing through Support

This theme explores Alan's perceptions towards getting assistance from others. Alan discusses the possibilities of getting support from both his family and foreign entities and emphasizes his willingness of seeking support. He basis this view upon family teachings, clarifying that his parents always encouraged him to look for support. Furthermore, he also declares that this learning helped shape his character, so that now he displays a readiness for professional assistance. In fact, when asked whether he would be willing to seek help, he replied:

*"… il-ġenituri tiegħi għallmuni li eħe, insib għajnuna f'ċertu affarijiet … biss, karattru tiegħi, naħseb, nasal infittex għajnuna, għalfejn le?" (*lines 697-701)	My parents taught me to seek help under certain circumstances … however, I think this is also my character, to be willing to seek help, why not?

Alan asserts that he would never resort to maladaptive behaviours in dealing with stress. He reinforces his previous willingness to seek help, through the following:

"Imma iwa għalfejn le għall-għajnuna. Ma tagħmilx sens … alkoħol u drogi. Ma tagħmilx sens, għalijja." (lines 713-715)	Yes, why not, to seek help. It does not make sense … alcohol and drugs. To me, it does not make sense

In addition, Alan reveals having a strong bond with his wife, and recounts instances whereby he turned to her for support. In the following excerpt, Alan identifies one coping mechanism he adopted:

"… sibt refuġju fil-mara, inkellimha, konna mmorru nimxu… Konna mmorru nimxu passiġġata, passiġġata… u nkellimha. Mhux l-ewwel darba li nfqajt nibki … ikellek naqra dwejjaq għalfejn le?" (lines 704-708)	I found refuge in my wife, we used to go walking … we used to go for a walk, a walk … and I'd talk to her. It's not the first time that I ended up crying … if you're feeling sad, why not?

Conversely, Alan also acknowledges that some problems cannot be shared with relatives. In such case, he highlights that he would rather seek professional support, rather than deal with his problems on his own. This assertion strengthens his previous arguments and reveals:

"...forsi jasal, allaħares qatt żmien, fejn għandi ċertu problema u ma rridx ngħid lill-mara. Mhux se niddejjaq jew mhux se naħsibha darba jew tnejn, ma ngħidilha xejn, u mmur insib l-għajnuna." (lines 822-824)	Maybe the day will come, hopefully not, whereby I cannot share my problem with my wife. I would find no difficulty, and I wouldn't think twice to seek support, without telling my wife

3 Martin's Case

Martin and I conducted this interview upon the premises of one of the said squadrons. I instantly noticed his eagerness to talk about issues, which he claimed he had never discussed with anyone else.

In fact, Martin immediately pointed out his frustrations at the organisations, particularly to the lack of staff and the added pressures instilled upon its employees. He also acknowledged that this pressure instils stress, which is often transferred onto his family members. This argument was discussed in detail later on in the interview. Martin gave a short description as to how he eventually signed up with the AFM, especially how he ended up in his current role. He reminisced over childhood memories, and stated that he always looked up to this specific role. He concluded this part of the interview by claiming that had it not been for a SAR mission, which he himself had witnessed, he would have enrolled in another career. Accordingly, it was this SAR mission which envisioned his future.

Our focus was then directed towards the images that the participant produced. Martin displayed one photograph. Through image 4, Martin reminisced about several incidents, which he vividly described. He described an incident, whereby a woman, suffering from terminal cancer, had to be transferred back to Gozo General Hospital, to be with her relatives in her last few moments of life. He was left impressed by the woman's violent behaviour onboard the aircraft and the doctor's calm and reassuring attitude. Martin claimed that he felt helpless at the time, and ended up reflecting upon life's purpose. Martin then reflected upon another incident. He illustrated in detail a recovery mission, during which a person had died by suicide. Particularly, he was impressed by the conditions in which this person was found and the difficulties the team encountered in recovering the dead person. Martin admitted that subsequently, he often ended up thinking and having flashbacks of this particular person.

Image 4

Military Aircraft

In contrast with the images of the dead person, Martin also recounts having encountered one of the most beautiful women alive whilst conducting a mission, and claimed that this episode reminded him of both the good and bad circumstances of life. Martin further depicted his responsibilities upon the aircraft, especially his responsibilities towards other crew members and people aboard.

In another part of the interview, Martin focused on how these experiences have shaped his character and mindset. Issues surrounding organisational deficiencies arose, and Martin explained that these have also impacted his relations with his wife. Feelings of frustration were also expressed towards a busy schedule and recurrent training whilst both on and off duty. In conclusion, Martin debated over issues of support, and declared

that he would find no objection in seeking further support if the need arises. He also considered situations whereby a support system within the military would be of no benefit, and gave examples surrounding a generation gap and a dearth of knowledge about the military.

Three themes arose from the interview:

i)   Lack of resources

ii)   Supportive measures

iii)   A reflective approach

These themes will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

3.1 Lack of Resources

Issues related to lack of resources, particularly manpower, were prominent in this interview. Right from the beginning, Martin pinpointed to the added pressures placed upon himself and his colleagues, due to the lack of human resources. He describes:

"...speċjalment in-nuqqas ta' nies li hawn haw ġew, nuqqas ta' nies, pressure fuqna…" (lines 27-28)	Especially the lack of human workforce over here, lack of staff, and an added pressure upon ourselves

Martin's frustration towards this deficiency is exhibited later on in the interview. He makes note of the added tasks imposed upon them by higher authorities, and their expectations of providing a valuable service, despite the organisational limitations. He further comments that they already suffered a similar situation, and suggests that the organisation remained adamant to the hardships that its employees had to endure. Martin explains:

"... dil-biċċa xogħol għaddejna minnha… għaddejna minnha meta telqu l-anzjani. Nies ma ħasbux, kien beda l-kors ... waqqfuh. Aħna għamilna sagrifiċċji kbar, jiġifieri konna naħdmu 24 rest, l-off day, u stand by sal-għada filgħodu…" (lines 543-546)

We have already been through this … we have been through this when our seniors left. They did not consider bringing more people, a course had started … and they discontinued it. We made huge sacrifices, we used to work 24 rest, a day on our off day, and then stand by until the next morning

Notwithstanding, Martin acknowledges the consequences of these pressures. He mentions how this affected his relations with his family, particularly his wife. He hints at the challenges their relationship had faced during said periods, and also makes reference to the struggles that some of his colleagues endured:

"...għaddejna minn dal-perjodu ikrah… f'dik is-sistema, jiġifieri, wieħed minnha sofra separazzjoni ... Kienet parti li beda l-inkwiet, jien dejjem bil-ġlied, wieħed minnhom li kont dejjem bil-ġlied. Anzi, m'għaddejtx mill-fażi ta' dan" (lines 548-552)

We have already been through this rough time … in that system, one of us went through a separation … it played a part in my own problems, I always had arguments, I was one of those who always had an argument going on. Somehow, I did not go through the same phase as him

Feelings of frustration and added pressure have altered Martin's mindset with regards to getting assistance from others, as revealed in the following theme.

3.2 Supportive Measures

This theme looks at Martin's readiness to seek professional support. When the argument of seeking alternative means of support was raised, Martin's opinion was made very clear, through stating (line 589) *"...jekk inħoss li għandi bżonn, why not?"* (If I feel the need to, why not?). Martin appears to be conscious as to when to seek help, and states:

"... jekk dawk (għall-esperjenzi trawmatiċi) l-affarijiet jibdew, bħal speċi idejquni jew jibqgħu f'moħħi, naħseb hemmhekk qisu… iddoqq il-qanpiena

If these things (referring to traumatic experiences) start to bother me, or remain in my thoughts, I think that is when the bells ring

258

li…" (lines 591-593)

In addition, he puts forth a statement, where he suggests that this position was not always consistent. Martin mentions stigma, and indicates that despite his current indifference towards this, matters of who and how one will be judged were significant a few years back. He attributes this change in mindset to the changing reality of other colleagues or acquaintances, and acknowledges that health issues can disrupt a person's normality. He claims:

"Ħa ngħidlek, jien illum-il-ġurnata, ma jimpurtanix lanqas mill-istigma, jiġifieri, ma nagħtix kas … kultant ngħid anke toqgħod, jien naf, li toqgħod tisma' istra dak hekk, marad hekk, l-ieħor hekk … filli qed tgħix il-ħajja normali u filli bum… għamilt test, għandek dik il-condition…" (lines 634-639)	Let me tell you, nowadays, I don't care, not even about stigma, I don't care at all … sometimes I tell myself, I don't know, even when you hear that that person has this, he's suffering from this, the other from that … One minute you're leading a normal life, and the next … you do a test, and results in that condition

Martin discloses that his first point of reference is always his family doctor, reasoning that since he visits him frequently to carry out medical tests related to his job, he feels at ease discussing certain issues with him. He reports:

"… l-ewwel ħaġa nibda through t-tabib tagħna … dak ikun il-first step … nibda minn hemm, jien personali. Jiġifieri nibda minnu, issa jien, it-tabib tagħna, apparti li ilu jħabbat wiċċu miegħi, jiġifieri… u iktar bħal speċi jkun jafek close u hekk… naħseb l-iktar persuna li tafni inside out, qed tifhem, allura naħseb l-ewwel… kull puncture, lilu, għandu." (lines 662-672)	I would start with the family doctor … that would be my first step … I'd start from there, personally. So, I'd start with him, now, my family doctor, apart from putting up with me for a long time … he would kind of, know you better ... I think he's the person who knows me best, so I think primarily … every puncture, I refer to him

3.3 A Reflective Approach

Whilst narrating these incidents, Martin admits to reflecting upon various aspects of life. According to Martin, such reflections happen regularly, even amidst, or right

after, the mission itself. Martin claims that he first started reflecting upon life, when he had transferred the terminally ill patient to Gozo. He could not only give details of the incident, but also of his reflections at the time. Moreover, he also acknowledged having frequent flashbacks of the patient herself. Martin also reflects through image 4 and recounts:

"… għadda daż-żmien kollu, bħal speċi, u bqajt niftakar fiha dil-biċċa tax-xogħol… u dil-mara għadni, għadni naraha… niftakar… nara wiċċha, imma… ma nafx, bħal speċi, qisni ħadt, ara l-bniedem f'liema estremita' jasal" (lines 227-230)	So much time has passed, and I can still remember this incident… I can still visualise this woman … I remember… I see her face, but … I don't know, kind of, l started considering the extremities, which human beings can end up in

Martin also reminisces about the various incidents and recalls the victims' appearances. He also admits to ending up reflecting upon the mental state of the victims and the elements that lead an individual to terminate own life:

"… huma esperjenzi tal-ħajja li jġagħluk taħseb, żgur… li jġagħluk taħseb fis-sens…anke, jew f'liema stat mentali jasal il-bniedem, jew anke, kemm ikollok kuraġġ biex inti tmur fil-ġenb, f'tarf u taqbeż, eżempju…" (lines 392-395)	These life experiences make you think … make you think in the sense that … even, the mental state of the person, or even the courage one must have in order to go somewhere, on the edge, and jump off, for example

His reflections also cause him to have future uncertainties. Martin makes reference to all the traumatic experiences he was involved in, and admits to regularly contemplate about them and their persistent effect. It appears that Martin feels insecure and apprehensive at the enduring effects of traumatic memories. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"… u kultant ngħid… jien naf, jiġifieri… jista' jkun fil-futur dawn, dawn l-episodju, ħafna episodji, bħal speċi, qed insemmu	Sometime I tell myself … I don't know … could it be that in the future, these, these episodes, kind of, we are currently

tnejn minnhom biss, sewwa, li ħa jkissruk mentalment? Hija question mark, ħeqq sew? Hija question mark…dinha…" (lines 247-250)

only referring to two, right, they will mentally break you? It's a question mark, right? This is a question mark

Additionally, Martin mentions that he has given up all hope that these memories will disappear. Instead, he reports trying to adopt a system, based upon positive thinking and looking at life from a positive perspective, to help him deal with trauma. He reflects this in the following:

"Id-domanda tiegħi kultant insaqsi lili nnifsi stess, għax mingħajr ma trid taħseb, ngħid imma la, la jgħaddi iktar żmien jew forsi la nitlaq minn hawn, ngħid nittama li dawn ma jsirux episodji li jkissruk mentalment, jew ifhimni, għalkemm nipprova nitlaq minn hawn, inqatta' paġna minn ħajti totalment, nagħmel hekk… impossibbli, din jiġifieri. Jiġifieri, nemmen li mpossibbli, imma, at least tipprova, tipprova taħseb fis-sabiħ biss tal-ħajja" (lines 380-387)

The question, which I often ask myself, because without wanting, you do end up thinking, I ask myself whether by time, as time passes, or when I leave this place, I trust that these episodes do not break me mentally down, or, even though I try to leave this place, I turn a new page … this is impossible. I believe this is impossible, but at least I try, I try to look at the positive things of life

4 Simon's Case

When I met Simon on the premises of the squadron, I was immediately taken aback by the sense of urgency within the grounds. Indeed, I was immediately informed that the interview could not take up more than a stipulated time, due to an unprecedented incident. No photographs were presented, with Simon adding that he could not think of anything that can be easily captured and be representative of his thoughts.

Simon was very hesitant to discuss details of specific incidents, despite myself asking probing questions. He explained that the incidents which have left the biggest impact involved dead individuals. During the interview, Simon made several

correlations between the incidents and his family, particularly his children. Explicitly, he explains in depth how his relationship with his children changed and evolved during his time serving as a soldier, and how he has become increasingly more aware of the risks and hazards that both his family and himself can be exposed to. This has led him to doing his utmost to keeping his family safe and giving them enough training so to handle as many challenging situations as possible. He also acknowledged his lack of guilt feelings whenever SAR missions are unsuccessful, surprisingly putting the blame on the victims.

For Simon, mental and physical toughness appear to be essential, especially in relation to his job. He focused mainly on his need to be physically strong and admitted to shirking away from medical and psychological assistance, unless urgently required. He concluded his interview discussing how his family is affected by the lack of understanding of higher authorities and the instability of working hours. Annoyed by the situation, Simon explained how he often gets called to carry out SAR missions when not on duty, and having to make unforeseen arrangements to care for his children.

Four emergent themes were identified for this case:

i)   Correlation with self

ii)   Increased awareness

iii)   Organisational obliviousness

iv)   Strength and toughness

Each theme will be analysed separately in the following sections.

4.1 Correlation with Self

Throughout this theme, instances whereby Simon associates incidents with family members were numerous. It appears that the events to which he responded have left him reflecting upon the wellbeing and safety of his children, especially. Simon admits that he pressured his daughters to learn swimming at a very young age, following an incident whereby a driver had driven into the sea and died, despite struggling to set himself free:

"U baqgħet taffetwani jiġifieri, għax it-tifla, jiġifieri, għandha erba' snin, u taf tgħum aħjar minna t-tnejn, għax jiġifieri ridtha li, fil-baħar, qbadt neħodha għall-għawm jiġifieri, għax tant kemm ridtha li titgħallem li… minn meta kellha, minn tat-twelid, mmm sitt xhur? Fil-baħar…" (lines 45-50)	It has affected me ever since, because even my daughter, who is four years old, she can swim better than both of us, because I wanted her to learn how to swim so much that I had taken her swimming… from when she was, from birth, mmm, six months? At sea

Simon further acknowledges that he does his utmost to successfully carry out each mission and save the lives of as many people as possible. His narrative suggests that he treats each individual as if it were a relative, and goes over and beyond to recover the casualty:

"Tibda tgħid kieku dak jiġi minni u kieku nafu, jew inkella… ħa naħdem l-istess daqslikieku, ħa nagħti l-hundred percent għalih? Ngħid isma'… jekk qed nara persuna, jien naf, qed infittixha, ma nistax insibha, u ħa ngħidlu (lis-senior) isma', din ma sibtiex… li kieku dil-persuna tiġi minni, ħa ngħidlu li ma sibtiex, jew nibqa' nfittex? Ħa nibqa nfittixha … daqslikieku persuna nafha, jiġifieri…" (lines 181-188)	I tell myself had this been a relative or someone I know, or … would I work differently, would I give my hundred percent? I'd say… if I am seeing a person, I don't know, maybe I'm looking for a person, , but can't find her, and I tell him (referring to his senior) that I did not find her… had this person been a relative, would I tell him that I couldn't find her or would I keep looking? I would keep looking … as if I'd known that person

This association between the incidental trauma and familial matters has eventually also increased his awareness to risk. It appears that this awareness has also impacted the way Simon behaves and acts when assessing danger. This idea will be analysed separately in the following theme.

4.2 Increased Awareness

The distressing events to which Simon has responded have changed the way he behaves and acts in situations, which are deemed normal for a civil individual. Simon narrates how fearful he has become when in close vicinity to the sea, so much that he removes his seatbelt and puts self at risk:

"... kif nasal ħdejn il-baħar, ninża s-seatbelt, awtomatikament jiġifieri. Jiġifieri għadni sal-ġurnata tallum ... inneħħi s-seatbelt. Kif nersaq lejn il-baħar inneħħieh, nista' naqla' ċitazzjoni jiġifieri... inneħħieh" (lines 57-62)

As soon as I get close to the sea, I automatically remove my seatbelt. Even up to this day … I remove my seatbelt. As soon as I approach the sea, I remove it, despite knowing that I can be fined … I remove it

Simon's ordeal has also been transferred onto his children. The previous theme exposed Simon's good intentions to provide his children with safety. In contrast to his children's safety, Simon also acknowledges his fear of not being able to save his children on time, if an incident had to occur. Due to this, Simon admits to stepping up precautions that could also pose danger to his daughters:

"Anke per eżempju, jkolli t-tfal, per eżempju, ikolli ż-żgħira miegħi ... ma naqfiliex qabel insuq u nitlaq minn ħdejn il-baħar, għax dejjem nibda naħseb li jien mhux ħa nilħaq inħollha." (lines 64-67)

Even if, for example, I have my children with me, especially my youngest daughter … I do not put her seatbelt on before I drive far from the sea, because I am always fearful that I do not manage to remove it on time

Throughout the interview, other aspects of increasing awareness emerged, with Simon stating his goal of trying to avoid high-risk situations. Simon gave me the

impression that he often reflects upon his life, and prioritises his activities depending upon their effect on his family. Simon also admits that such awareness has been brought about by age, but defers from clarifying whether it is mainly experience-related or due to personal maturity. This increased awareness is demonstrated in the following excerpts:

"... iktar ma tikber iktar tinbidel... tibda tara l-affarijiet minn perspettiva differenti, speċi... hekk, anke ċertu affarijiet li kont nagħmel qabel, ma naħsibx li nagħmilhom illum ... Tibda tgħid isma', għalxiex ħa nagħmilha dil-biċċa xogħol, speċi jiena, meta jekk jiena, ħa jiġrili xi ħaġa, ħa jbati ħaddiehor?" (lines 114-123)

The older you grow, the more you change … you start viewing things from a different perspective, kind of… even some things that I used to do before, I doubt whether I would do them today … you start asking yourself why am I going to do this, when others will carry the burden if something bad had to happen to me?

4.3 Organisational Obliviousness

This theme exposes Simon's frustrations towards the organisation and the unstable nature of their working conditions. During this part of the interview, Simon expressed feelings of annoyance towards the organisation, mainly for its lack of understanding. His narrative suggests that the organisation is more inclined towards perfecting its duties, rather than towards the wellbeing of its employees. In fact, Simon's account hints that the organisation treats them as just a number:

"...ħafna min-nies, per eżempju, tagħhom biss jaraw, ta' ħaddiehor ma jifhmuhx... jarawk bħala persuna u ma jarawx x'għandek wara..." (lines 290-292)

For example, most of the people only acknowledge what is theirs, they don't understand others... they only see you as a person, they don't acknowledge what troubles you

Furthermore, Simon shares his frustration at the lack of interpersonal relations that exist between several members. In particular, he points at the unwillingness of some members to acknowledge the experiences and feelings of others, and their predisposition to being more focused on the job rather than the personal lives of their fellow members:

"...hu jaf jgħidli kemm domt, kemm domt per eżempju... ara xi ġralu bniedem, ara għal xiex dal-bniedem... fhimt?" (lines 283-285)

He might ask me how long I have taken for example … ask him what happened to him instead, why… you understand?

This obliviousness appears to create tension amidst the familial environment. Simon declares that he often receives a call when at home, ordering him back to work, due to unexpected circumstances. He expresses frustration at having to work at a time which was supposed to be spent with his family and at having to make alternative arrangements for his children. This is portrayed in the following excerpt:

"...jien irrid nara kif ħa nihhandilja... għax inti (għas-senior) bgħattilna li ħa ndumu tlett ijiem. Jiena dawk it-tlett ijiem irrid nara kif ħa nħalli t-tifla..." (lines 339-341)

I have to handle things differently … because you (referring to his seniors) told us that we would be away for three days, for which I have to make alternative arrangements for my daughter

Lastly, Simon explains further that such calls occur any time of the day, and as much as he is concerned about his children's safety, his job often puts him in situations whereby he is provided with no other alternative than to jeopardise their safety. He describes:

"...minħabba l-problema li hawn hawnhekk, ta' nuqqas ta' nies, qed inbatu aħna, għedtlu (lis-senior) għidli inti fi x'ħin ħa nieħu t-tifla, fil-ħdax ta' bil-lejl, għand min ħa neħodha? Għedtlu jbatu t-tfal tagħna minħabba l-problema t'hawn... bħat-tifla riedet tkun x'imkien u ma setgħetx tmur, biex toqgħod m'oħtha sakemm tiġi ommha mix-xogħol..." (lines 322-328)

We are suffering due to the current lack of employees, I told him (referring to his senior) tell me at what time will I take my daughter, at eleven at night, where am I supposed to take her? I told him our children are suffering because of the job's crisis … my daughter had to be somewhere else, but she couldn't go, she had to look after her younger sister until her mother arrived home from work

4.4 Strength and Toughness

Simon's need to be mentally and physically strong was also brought up. Throughout the interview, Simon hints several times that he is reluctant to seek both medical and psychological assistance. Never does he explain in detail the reasons behind this reluctance. On the contrary, he chooses to discuss the importance of being mentally strong, especially if eager to pursue this career. He makes reference to one of his colleagues, who left the squadron on his first day, and somewhat hints that his reluctance arises from his capacity to remain mentally well. He describes:

"… għax tkun sod naħseb. Għax niftakar ta' dik it-tarbija, niftakar, li qed ngħidlek, kien hemm ieħor (għal kollega ieħor) miegħi, jiġifieri. Niftakar kienet l-ewwel ġurnata tiegħu … u l-aħħar ġurnata kienet. Telaq, ma felaħx għaliha, jiġifieri. Imma mbagħad il-bniedem kemm ikun b'saħħtu jiġifieri, naħseb jiena. Nimmaġina li kemm ikun kapaci jiħħandiljaha waħdu…" (lines 201-206)

I believe that it's because you're strong. Because I remember the case of that baby, there was someone else with me. I remember it was his first day … and his last. He left, he could not handle it. But then it depends upon the individual's strength, I think. I believe it depends upon his ability to deal with it on his own

When asked how he manages to maintain his strength, Simon (line 212) acknowledges *"… jien qatt ma' nħares lejn in-negattiv ee, dejjem pożittiv …"* (I never look at things negatively, I am always positive). Simon reflects upon this statement, and notes that despite trying to be positive, circumstances do not always turn up to be so. Finally, he concludes by explaining that being pessimistic tends to affect work performance, as well as mental wellbeing.

Simon moves on to illustrate how his psychological strength appears to be reflected in his physical wellbeing. He illustrates this by explaining that he manages to withstand all types of pain, avoiding all sorts of medical visits. He concludes by stating that it is only in the worst and most urgent circumstances that he seeks medical

assistance. He clarifies this by describing his own personal experience, during which he suffered a bad injury to his hand:

"Jien anke nkun muġugħ u ma ngħid xejn, speċi ngħid u iwa issa jgħaddili. Imma niftakar, tant kemm kont muġugħ, li bdejt nibki bl-uġiegħ… uġiegħ kbir f'idejja u… bdejt nibki bl-uġiegħ, ma flaħtx iktar, jiġifieri… imbagħad hemmhekk mort għand tabib u wara ndunajd x'kelli… ma tantx, tobba u hekk, ma tantx, dejjem nipprova niħhandilja lili nnifsi." (lines 249-256)	Personally, I do not speak up, even when I am in pain, kind of, I assert myself that it will pass. But I remember, I was in so much pain, that I was crying … my hand was hurting badly … And I started crying with the pain, I could not withstand it any longer … then I went to see a doctor and later realised what I had … not much, doctors and that sort of thing, not much, I always try to handle things my own way

The participant avoids divulging further into this discussion, but appears to believe that unless the supportive person has not experienced the ordeal itself, he cannot truly understand the other person's suffering. In fact, he explains (lines 259-260) *"…bniedem ma tkunx taf xi jħoss, mhux ħa tgħidlu isma' inti m'għandek xejn…"* (When you can't understand what that person is feeling, you cannot tell him that he doesn't have anything).

5 Terrence's Case

The first time I met Terrence, during the debriefing session, I could immediately sense an unwillingness to partake in this study. Terrence portrayed himself as a tough person, who at first glance gives the impression that no challenge can break him. I had not yet observed such or similar sturdiness in any of the previous participants. Conversely, before initiating the interview, I was surprised at Terrence's eagerness to vent out feelings and thoughts, which caused me to reflect, for the first time, on issues of coping and confidentiality. The latter issue was also reflected in Terrence frequently wanting to confirm whether what transpires in the interview remains confidential.

Throughout the interview, possible reasons as to why he might have been initially reluctant to partake, emerged.

Terrence started off by giving an overview of his role in the squadron and what his job entails. He further commented on how he describes himself as a person, claiming that he barely recognises himself anymore. Terrence explained that he has changed drastically, especially due to the hardships and challenges he faced over the years. He also gave reasons as to why he enrolled within the military, stating that it was purely a childhood dream.

The participant presented himself for the interview with one photograph (image 5). He explained that this particular military boat acts as a reminder of both positive and negative experiences. He began by describing a particular incident, over which Terrence still experiences guilt feelings. During this particular incident, a boat, which was filled with illegal immigrants had capsized. Terrence narrated the incident in detail, vividly describing the scene and expressing guilt feelings over not being able to save one particular woman. He stated that he often reflects upon this incident and asks himself whether anything else could have been done to save her. On the other hand, Terrence relates this boat to the positive experiences that the AFM also poses its members to. He narrated an account in which the crew came into contact with a whale, whilst carrying out duties off the Maltese coastline and also accounted for being engaged in training in foreign countries. Furthermore, Terrence stated that this boat also acts as a reminder of the tough working conditions and having to work long hours, sometimes even days, away from home.

Image 5

Military Watercraft

During the interview, Terrence also made note of other personal struggles, which have deeply impacted him. Particularly, he mentioned the death of one of his parents and the added responsibilities and burdens this brought with it. He also acknowledged that had he looked for help during this period, he might have changed differently. Lastly, he concluded by stating that if need be, he would be willing to get support from others, as long as issues of confidentiality and trust are maintained.

Three themes were identified in this case:

i)   Emotional havoc

ii)　　　Instability of the job

iii)　　　Features of organisational support

The themes will be analysed in the following sections.

5.1 Emotional Havoc

Throughout this theme, instances whereby the participant expresses emotional instability will be analysed. Right from the beginning of the interview, Terrence expressed guilt feelings over one particular incident. Terrence narrates the distressing incident, stating that the decisions made at the time were cautiously made so as to preserve the life of crew members. It appears that Terrence often reflects upon this incident, asking himself if anything could have been done to save the life of the one person who could not be saved. Terrence also reflects upon this incident, and many similar others, and portrays this in image 5. Furthermore, he relates this particular incident to a bad dream:

"Kienet siegħa li ma nista' ninsa qatt minn quddiem għajnejja, għax, nies fil-baħar jippruvaw jiggranfaw ma' kollox, nies iċafċfu, uu… Ħolma kerha, ħolma kerha. U meta, meta taħseb fuqha, jew meta jkollok lil xi ħadd miż-żgħar, tibda trewwem, trid bilfors issemmijielu, biex, biex, biex…. Weġġgħatni għax forsi kieku forsi għamilna sikka żgħira oħra, forsi konna nsalvawha… tgħid, tibqa' tgħid… xi stajt nagħmel iktar? Naqbeż jien? Ħa taqbeż inti forsi jgħerrquk, għax jaqbdu jiggranfaw miegħek…" (lines 70-76)

I can never forget that hour, there were people in the sea, trying to grab hold to whatever they could, people trying to swim, and … It was a bad dream, a bad dream. And when, when you think about it, or when you have a junior with you, you have to narrate this to him, to, to … It hurts, because maybe, had we done another reef, maybe we could have saved her … you keep asking yourself … what else could I have done? Plunge in myself? If you jump, they might drown you, because they grab onto you

Terrence further adds that this incident remains on his conscience, especially since he cannot answer any of the questions he puts forth himself. His account suggests that he finds peace in his faith, claiming:

"Tibqa' ssaqsi ħafna mistoqsijiet lilek innifsek li qatt m'inti ħa tieħu tweġiba għalihom, qatt hux… dakinhar immisjajna persuna, qegħda fuq il-kuxjenza tiegħi nħoss… jekk stajtx nagħmel iktar jew le, Alla biss jaf, imbagħad jiġġudika l-Mulej la nkunu quddiemu…" (lines 79-89)	You keep asking yourself a lot of questions, that you will never get any answers for, never … That day we lost a person, I feel it is still on my conscience … only God knows if I could have done anything else or not, then He will judge, once we turn up in front of Him

For Terrence, the struggles with his emotional wellbeing were not related solely to the job. He accounts to the personal struggles he had to endure whilst caring for his mother, who was terminally ill. His choice of words suggests that this experience has left him dealing with underlying resentment and anger.

Notwithstanding, these experiences have also affected the way he relates with other members of his family. Terrence shares the challenges he endured with his wife, and admits to having been inconsiderate towards her:

"… kien hemm żminijiet fejn ikklexjajt bil-kbir mal-mara. Kont ngħidilha j'Alla ma tgħaddix mill-martirju li għaddej jien…" (lines 244-245)	There was a time when I clashed big time with my wife. I used to tell her pray to God that you never go through the hardships that I am going through

When asked about the emotional impact of these experiences, Terrence admits to still having a difficult time dealing with the impact of some of these events. In fact, he states this through the following excerpt:

"…għadu sa llum-il-ġurnata jweġġagħni. Għadu sa llum-il-ġurnata jaħraqni. Meta nitkellem fuqu… ma tantx nieħu pjaċir nitkellem fuqu…meta nitkellem fuqu, it	It still hurts up to this day. It still bothers me up to this day. When I talk about it … I don't really like to talk about it … when I talk about it, it hurts … it hurts a lot …

272

hurts… it hurts a lot…. It hurts a lot…"   it hurts a lot
(lines 94-97)

According to Terrence, his emotional instability is related to the accumulation of various experiences and factors, which he refers to (line 203) as *"Il-cocktail qawwi hux"* (The cocktail is intense). Apart from the distressing events and familial struggles, which he endured, Terence also made note to describe various organisational deficits that add on to his emotional distress. These will be analysed in the next section.

5.2 Instability of the Job

This theme deals with the organisational factors that make the job highly unstable. Terrence commences by giving details as to the working hours of the job. Annoyed by the situation, he explains that he cannot make arrangements to enjoy his time off, as he frequently gets called to resume his duties, even on his days off. Terrence describes:

"…ix-xiftijiet huma ta' erbgħa u għoxrin siegħa, tibda fis-sebgħa u tispiċċa fis-sebgħa ta' filgħodu. Ikun hemm każi fejn taqbeż dawk il-ħinijiet. Hawn… tkun id-dar f'nofs ta' lejl, iċempillek il-mobile, jgħidlek siegħa u nofs oħra trid tkun ix-xogħol. Iċempillek fis-sagħtejn ta' filgħodu, jgħidlek sal-erbgħa trid tkun ix-xogħol, fil-ħamsa rridu naqilgħu. Erm, tkun qiegħed tieġ u jċempillek, jgħidlek trid tidħol għax-xogħol issa… iċempillek mix-xogħol, isma' ħij, ħassar il-festi, ħassar il-barbeque, ħassar it-tieġ, ara x'impenji għandek u ejja x-xogħol."
(lines 157-166)

Shifts are 24 hours long, starting at seven and finishing at seven the following morning. Sometimes, you go beyond these hours. For example …, you'd be at home, the phone rings in the middle of the night, and tells you that you have to be at work in an hour and a half's time. He phones at four in the morning and tells you that you have to be at work by four, as at five we depart. Erm, you'd be at a wedding, he phones and tells you that you have to go to work instantly … he phones from work and tells you to cancel all your plans, be it a barbeque, wedding, check whatever commitments you have, and come to work

It appears that Terrence's frustrations go over and above the duration of his duties. The military boat portrayed in image 5 is a constant reminder for Terrence of all the struggles they have to endure on a daily basis. Terrence explains that apart from the said issues, other issues onboard the watercraft deprive him of sleep. Terrence hints at feeling constantly tense and on edge whilst onboard the watercraft and acknowledges the lasting impact of this matter through the following:

"Ġieli f'erbgħa u għoxrin siegħa tistrieħ sagħtejn, tlett siegħat… jekk jirnexxielek. Malli tisma' ċaqliqa abbord, anke jien naf, bniedem mar jagħmel kafe, tisimgħu, tħossu…. Tħoss xi ħoss li mhux normali, tinduna, jiġifieri… tibda tiċċekja x'qed jiġri u ma jiġrix, tisma' mobile idoqq… x'inqala'? Ħeqq, il-ħin kollu, ħin kollu…. Ma tkunx mistrieħ qatt… ma tkunx mistrieħ. Ġieli… ġieli ma rqadna xejn. Jekk ikun hemm ammonti kbar ta xogħol ġieli ma rqadna xejn hux… dana tagħmel ħamsa u għoxrin siegħa, sitta u għoxrin siegħa straight imqajjem, m'humiex sbieħ… m'humiex." (lines 180-187)

Sometimes, you rest maybe two, or three hours in 24 hours … if you manage to. As soon as you hear a noise onboard, even if someone prepares some coffee, you can hear him, you can feel him … You realise immediately when something is not normal … you start checking, what is going on, you listen to a phone ringing… what happened? All the time, all the time. You are never rested … never rested. There were times when we didn't sleep. If we have a lot of work to do, we don't rest … to be awake for 25, or 26 hours straight is not nice… it's not

Furthermore, he claims that the effects of the job's conditions are often transferred into the home environment, a setting, which is supposed to help him disconnect from the job. Terrence describes that he often experiences distressing thoughts that do not allow him to sleep. He claims:

"… l-agħar, l-agħar tmur id-dar… u ma tkunx tista' torqod, ġieli taqa' overtired, u ġieli tagħmel lejl b'għajnejk miftuħa, tibda tisma' t-tisfir tal-magni f'widnejk." (lines 187-189)

The worst part is going home … and being unable to sleep, sometimes you become overtired, and at times you spend the night wide awake, hearing the sound of the engines in your ears

Despite this ordeal, Terrence admits that he prefers to deal with his suffering on his own. That said, he admits that had he considered looking for support, he would have

dealt with certain situations differently. The following theme will discuss his views with regards to organisational support.

5.3 Features of Organisational Support

When matters of professional support were discussed, Terrence admitted that as employees, issues surrounding mental health are rarely taken into account. He claims that there is lack of awareness, and subsequently, infrequent professional support:

"... naħseb hawn bżonn u m'hawnx daqsekk awareness li, li għandna bżonn iktar għajnuna." (lines 271-273)	I think there is the need, but there is not much awareness that, that we need more support

He explains in detail the AFM's structure, and emphasises the need for more professional support in operational sections. Furthermore, Terrence also claims that colleagues working in non-operational units tend to downgrade the severity of others' distress. Consequently, he reports feeling belittled and expresses feelings of disempowerment to such statements. He describes:

"...eżempju aħna Ħal Luqa titla'... u ija intom mhux toħorġu tistadu.... Toħroġ tistad?! X'tistad tistad! U ijja, intom mhux toħorġu dduru dawra ma' Malta.... Juruk li, bħal speċi, mhux jistmaw xogħlok u r-riskju, u s-sagrifiċċji, ħeqq... ħadd ma jigi miegħek f'baħar qawwi ddur Malta, jew toħroġ fuq biċċa xogħol hux ħeqq ħeqq ħeqq ħeqq, aħna nkunu hemm barra, inti u sħabek... m'hemmx dak l-apprezzament minn minn minn... in ġenerali ... m'hemmx dak l-apprezzament speċjalment... fl-AFM tweġġa' ma tkunx apprezzat mill-entita li qed taħdem fiha, inħossha li... li tweġġa' daqsxejn..." (lines 330-338)	For example, when we go to Luqa … they're like, you only go fishing… Go fishing?! What fishing?! Also, you go round the Maltese coastline… they show you that they do not appreciate your work, the risks, and the sacrifices… nobody comes along in bad weather, around Malta, or to carry a mission... we would be out there, you and your colleagues … there is no appreciation from from from … in general, there is no appreciation, especially… in the AFM it hurts, especially when the entity you are part of does not appreciate your work, I feel that… it hurts

Terrence also accounts to various characteristics that can promote help-seeking behaviour. He refers, particularly, to issues of empathy and having a sound knowledge of the military culture. Terrence notes that it is difficult for anyone to understand a soldier's personal turmoil, unless having personally experienced the distress. He adds that one cannot be empathetic unless having a solid understanding of what their job entails. He notes:

"Li jkun xi ħadd midħla fix-xogħol, dejjem ħeqq ħeqq… li jkun qed jilbes daqsxejn iż-żarbun tiegħek dejjem ħa jgħinek iktar għax jekk ħa ngħidlu fuq dan l-oġġett, qed jifhem fuq xiex qed inkellmu…" (lines 355-357)	To have someone who is knowledgeable about the job, that's always … to be able to don your own shoes, that is always going to help you more, because if I talk to him about this issue, he would understand what that issue entails

In conclusion, Terrence also points out to matters of confidentiality. He highlights the need for supportive entities to display professional confidentiality, in an attempt to build trust and encourage more individuals to seek support:

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"… il-fiduċja reċiproka bejnek u bejn min qed titkellem hux… imbagħad jew ħa tibni bond ma' persuna jew psikjatra, whatever min ikun, li ħa tavdaw, ħa tiftaħ qalbek miegħu u ħa jgħinek, jew ħeqq ħeqq… javvelik ma' kulħadd … kemm inti lest titkellem u kemm min-naħa l-oħra, min ħa jitkellem ħa jkun professjonali fuq xogħlu…" (lines 381-387)	The reciprocal trust between you and the person with whom you are talking … then you're either going to build a bond with the person, or psychiatrist, whoever that is, whom you can trust, that you can talk to and get support from, or … he will ridicule you with everyone… how willing you are to speak up and from his end, how professional he will be in his line of duty

6 Joseph's Case

Joseph immediately portrayed himself as an outgoing person, with a passion for making others laugh. This characteristic prompted me to reflect upon the negative and

positive consequences that such a trait could pose. Indeed, I came to the conclusion that this trait could act as both a coping mechanism and a means of escaping reality.

Joseph spoke primarily about his love for the military and his childhood aspiration to join the army. He also reflected upon his future, claiming that he is as of yet uncertain as to how he will spend his retirement days. Joseph then reflected upon image 6, the only photograph taken for the purpose of this interview. He revealed that this image reminds him of two particular occasions, both of which had left a negative impact on his life. In relation to the first instance, Joseph recounted a rescue, which he himself had conducted at the specific location. He narrated that on that occasion, the crew had undergone a SAR mission to rescue two divers, who had found themselves in difficulty whilst diving. Regrettably, only one diver was rescued, whereas the other individual was recovered the day after in another location. He vividly recounted the tough environmental conditions in which they had to work and his feelings of despair and guilt for not being able to rescue both. Furthermore, this image also acted as a reminder of a personal crisis, which Joseph was undergoing during the same period of the said incident. Joseph also recounted other incidents, which were not related to the photograph captured.

Image 6

Gozitan Landscape
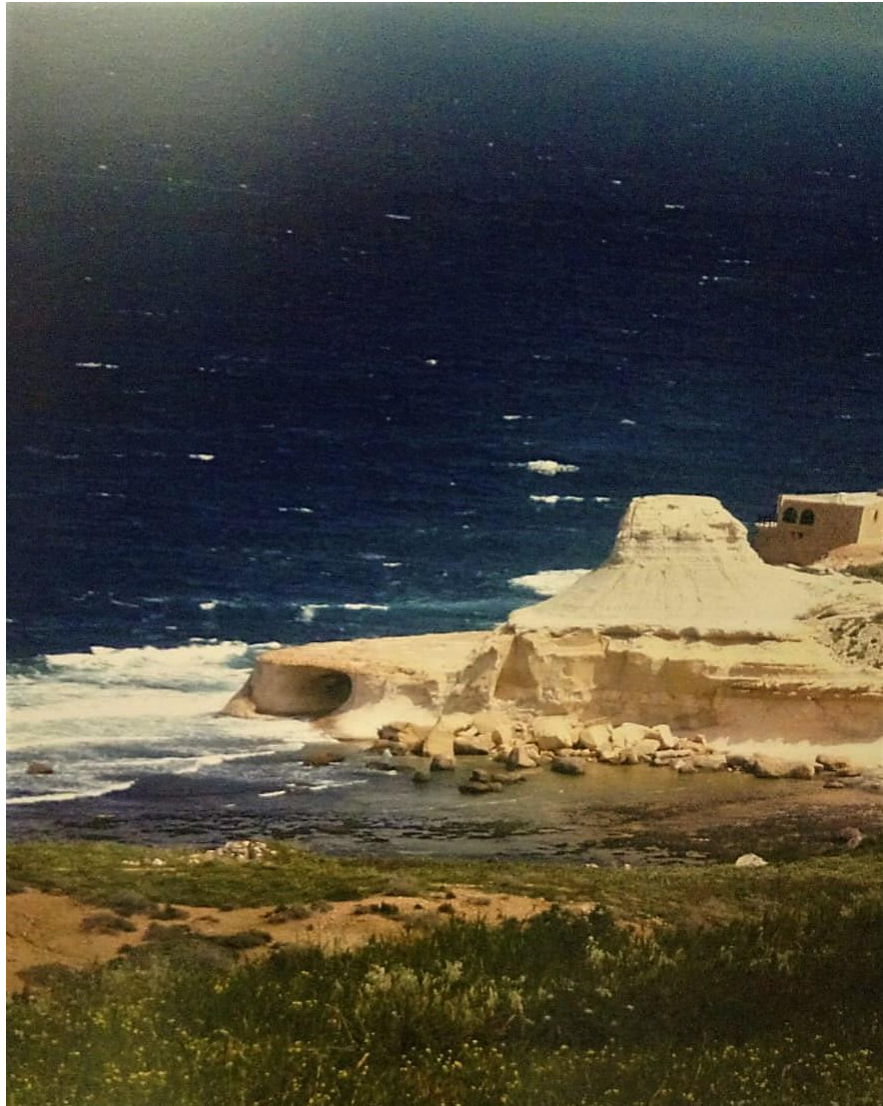
Joseph admitted to making several correlations between himself and the undertaken missions, especially when missions involving young adults or children are carried out. Furthermore, Joseph admitted that these incidents are the ones which he remembers mostly, although other events, in which he put his life on the line also appear

to have left an impact. He also acknowledged being changed by these experiences, and stated that he tends to assess each situation carefully, be it work related or not. According to Joseph, he has also taken on a new perspective on life and prefers to live minute by minute.

Throughout the interview, Joseph also expressed his frustrations towards the organisation, especially in view of its lack of understand towards employees. When asked about his views regarding issues of support, Joseph stated that he prefers to handle each situation on his own. He acknowledged that stigma is the primary reason for not seeking help and claimed that since problems persist even after professional support, he prefers to deal with distress in his own way.

Three themes were identified in this interview:

i)   Distressing memories

ii)   Healing in own way

iii)   Frustration towards organisation

Each will be analysed next.

6.1 Distressing Memories

Instances whereby Joseph expressed distress over traumatic memories were various, and will be analysed in this theme. Joseph made use of image 6 to illustrate an event, which he feels has left a huge impact on his life. He recounted the difficulties he and his crew encountered due to the bad weather conditions and how he had given up all hope of rescuing at least one of the two individuals. Joseph's narrative implies that the

dangerous conditions in which they had to work, might have been one of the reasons as to why this event remained so ingrained. He describes the conditions as follows:

"...qegħdin nippruvaw intellgħuhom, u s-saħħa tal-baħar illi kien, ma ħalliniex. Ninżlu kimportant ħdejhom, fuqhom u jerġgħu jinġibdu 'l isfel bil-baħar, erm... ħafna ragħwa li ma tarax, itellahielek post ieħor... sakemm itellahielek post ieħor u inti għadek qed tissielet mal-ilma, jew qed tipprova tinżel hdejn il-persuna, għax qed tinstabat mal-blat... sakemm qed tipprova mbagħad forsi, ħa ttella' lill-ieħor, reġgħet niżlet l-oħra, reġa' tellahielek..."
(lines 107-114)

We were trying to save them, but due to the rough seas, we could not. We'd be close to them, and they'd go down with the waves, erm... too much sea foam, making it impossible to see, and the sea just spurts her from somewhere else... whilst this happens, you're still struggling with the waves, or still trying to get close to the person, because she's crashing into the rocks... whilst you're trying, then maybe you'll save the other, she goes down again, and up again

Joseph further describes that despite doing their utmost to rescue both individuals, the persistent weather conditions did not give them enough time to rescue both. He explains that by the time they had taken the first casualty to safety, the other diver was nowhere to be seen, and was later recovered by his colleagues:

"Tana ċans intellgħu wieħed... l-oħra sakemm tellajnieh, tellajnieh u morna lura, laħqet għerqet, laħqet niżlet, niżlet, niżlet, jiġifieri ma baqgħetx tidher. Il-baħar imbagħad tefagħha taħt, u baqgħet mgħerrqa, u tellawha l-għada... baqgħu... nagħmlu s-searches u nagħmlu... u tellgħuha d-divers l-għada."
(lines 130-134)

We had time to save but one ... by the time we took him to safety, the other drowned, she went down, down, down, until she was no longer visible. The sea cast her deep down, and she remained under. She was recovered the day after... they kept searching for her ... and the divers recovered her the day after

The participant recounts other occasions, in which a SAR mission had to be carried out in perilous conditions. Amidst his description, he acknowledges having been in danger of losing own life. He describes:

"...tlettax-il pied il-mewġ, inżilt għaliha, dlam ċappa, jiġifieri dik kienet rescue kbira wkoll....inżilt, tellgħajt żewġ divers

The waves were thirteen feet high, I went down for her, pitch darkness, that was another extensive rescue ... I saved two

… kellna ħajjitna fil-periklu, għax pitch black kien… dak ir-riħ kollu li kien hemm, imur xi ħaġa fil-X ħażina, idur il-cable miegħek, ma tkunx qed tarah, dlam ċappa…" (lines 221-232)	divers … Our lives were at stake, because it was pitch black… with all those winds, had something gone wrong with X, or the cable turned around ourselves, you wouldn't see it, in total darkness
"… ġieli ġieli tara s-siġar ħa jinqalgħu ġieli, u inti sejjer għar-rescue, u x-xita u s-sajjetti, ħeqq... it's not easy…" (lines 307-309)	Sometimes you can see the trees nearly detaching from the ground, and you have to go for a rescue, in the rain and thunderstorms ... it's not easy

According to Joseph, there are other reasons as to why some events remain so established in memory. He concludes that personal circumstances also play a role, and states (lines 215-216) *"…ċertu minnhom tibqa' tiftakarhom għax ikun hemm xi ħaġa marbuta ma ħajtek…"* (You can remember some of them, because they are usually related to something personal). In fact, Joseph recounted another event, in which a young victim was involved. He acknowledged that the incident reminds him of the phase, whereby he and his wife were struggling to having children of their own.

He also acknowledged remembering his first rescue, which he considers to having been traumatic:

"… niftakar l-ewwel rescue, li għamilt, għax kienet l-ewwel wahda, u ovvja, CPR u bdiet ittella' d-demm minn ħalqha left, right and centre… allura dik ħa tibqa' tiftakarha…" (lines 202-204)	I remember my first rescue, because it was the first one, obviously, CPR, and she was spurting out blood from her mouth, left, right and centre … so that I will always remember

Notwithstanding, these experiences bring about an array of emotions. Feelings of guilt, fear and defeat are prominent in his narrative, indicating that it is not just the event that remains rooted in memory, but also, the feelings and thoughts experienced on the day. These feelings can be visualised in these excerpts:

"Thossha hux, għax inti tkun… bħalma ġieli ħassejtha fuq rescues oħra, tibda tismagħhom jgħajjtu għall-għajnuna u ma tistax tarahom, għax ikun ħafna dlam, per eżempju u… tibda tisma' l-għajjat, tibda tgħid minn fejn ġej? U ma jkollhom xejn fuq, x'jin, x'jindikalom… ifhem baħar imqalleb ta' kien, jiġifieri m'għola tlettax-il pied il-mewġ kien, jiġifieri…" (lines 134-139)

It's difficult, especially since you'd be … similarly to other rescues, you can hear them shouting for help, but you can't see them, because it's really dark, for example, and … you hear their cries, and ask yourself where it's coming from. And they'd have worn nothing to indicate… the sea was very rough, the waves were thirteen feet high

The notion of distressing memories was also portrayed in a statement, which he stated to explain how these events have disrupted his life. He claims (line 191) *"… bdejt noħlom ikrah immens…"* (I started having really bad dreams), which he explains as having later subsided on their own. Throughout the interview, Joseph also made several references to the statement *"… biż-żmien ittaffi hux… biż-żmien ittaffi…"* (Time heals everything … time heals everything), implying that he learned to adapt to these memories in his own way. That said, he never comments on the mechanisms that he adopts to deal with trauma.

6.2 Healing in Own Way

When the interview concentrated on issues of coping and support, Joseph admitted that he prefers to deal with his ordeals on his own. He acknowledged the fact that other individuals might require assistance, but debated on what professional support can provide that the individual self cannot. He explains the following:

"Jien ma nafx x'jista jagħmillek imbagħad dax-xi ħadd… le le… għax jiena jekk, per eżempju, ġejt nitkellem miegħek fuq problema, mhux xorta hemm ħa tibqa'? Fil-verita inti trid tkun imbagħad … hemmhekk ħa tibqa' l-problema hux, allura might as well, fis-sens, tipprova tirranġa inti, waħdek u

I don't know what this person can do to help you… because if, for example, I came to talk to you about a problem, won't the problem persist? In truth, it depends upon you … the problem will still persist, so might as well, you try deal with it on your own first, and then act accordingly

tara naqra…" (lines 338-348)

Furthermore, Joseph appears to be aware of signs and symptoms of a changing personality, declaring that he tends to keep an eye out on his colleagues for the development of any of these changes. He describes these symptoms as follows:

"… jien inħobb niċċajta u nidħaq, forsi ma nibqax niċċajta u nidħaq, nibda ninqata' għalija… naf ħafna sintomi, tinqata' għalik, ma tibdiex torqod sew, tibda tqum ħafna mal-lejl… bħalma ġieli jiġrili hehehe… jiġifieri, hemm ħafna affarijiet hux…. Toħlom ikrah bħalma ġieli… bħalma għedtlek l-ewwel…" (lines 382-386)	I like to joke and laugh, maybe I won't do so anymore, I start spending more time on my own … I know a lot of symptoms, spending time alone, disrupted sleep, awakening frequently at night … as I experience most often hehehe… so, there are a lot of things… Having nightmares, like … like I mentioned before

Despite his unwillingness to seek professional support, Joseph admits that it is only under one circumstance that he would consider it. According to Joseph, it is only when others indicate that he is no longer his usual self that he would engage in professional support:

"… nikkunsidraha imbagħad, jekk persuna tgħidli għandek bżonn l-għajnuna mmur neħodha, ehe…" (lines 376-377)	I would consider then, if someone had to tell me that I need help, I would reach out, yes

In conclusion, Joseph also hints at matters related to stigma. He states (line 450) *"… nemmen li kieku jkun hemm, ikollok tieħu l-għajnuna, ikollok timbru, nemmen jien…"* (I believe there would be, if you had to seek help, you would be shamed). This view on help-seeking behaviour might add to his and others' unwillingness to seek professional assistance.

6.3 Frustration towards Organisation

During the interview, Joseph hinted at various situations within the AFM that instil frustration, particularly when orders are given out. Joseph hints at instances in which an individual is imposed to do something, without any prior consideration as to personal commitments. Furthermore, Joseph also hints at instances whereby roles are interchanged and individuals are chosen to carry out additional tasks without previous deliberation as to the current responsibilities, education or commitments. He explains:

"... jekk dawn it-tnejn jiena għandi bżonnhom hawnhekk, għandi għalxiex noqgħod ngħidlek ismagħni, għax aħna għandna din il-biċċa tax-xogħol, irridu nagħmlu hekk... jiena kuntent qiegħed hekk, kif tiġi tgħidli irridek hawn, jekk jiena għamilt għomri u żmieni biex nilħaq fejn ilħaqt, issa tiġi tgħidli għamel din? Nerġa' nibda back from square one allura? I am just a number? M'intix tara jien, ir-records tiegħi fejn qegħdin, u l-courses tiegħi fejn qegħdin? Kif għetli biex nagħmel xi ħaġa li jista' jagħmilha suldat ieħor?" (lines 363-370)

If I need these two over here, do I need to tell you, listen, because we have this task to do, we have to do this… I am happy the way I am, how come you tell me that you need me elsewhere, if I've spent my whole career to get where I am today, and order me to do that? Do I have to start from square one then? Am I just a number? Can't you see my records, the courses that I have attended? How come you ordered me to do something that another soldier can do?

With regards to issues of support within the army itself, Joseph also expressed a lack of freedom as to when and if to seek support. According to Joseph, the army has recently started providing additional support to its employees, especially those engaged within the operational units. In relation, he recounts an instance whereby he was ordered to seek psychological aid, without him having asked for it. Joseph acknowledges the organisation's attempt at providing support, however, expresses his scepticism at the procedure by which soldiers are encouraged to attend.

Particularly, Joseph questions whether it is appropriate for an officer to command him to seek psychological support, especially in cases whereby there is evident lack of interpersonal connection. He explains:

"… jien din, prattikalment, injoranza naraha imbagħad… li tiġi ordnat li inti… inti kif taf, inti bħala fizzjal, kif taf jien x'għandi bżonn jekk inti lanqas biss tgħix miegħi? Fhimtni? Jew bilkemm tkellimni? Kif tiġi tordnali hekk?" (lines 418-420)

This is, practically, foolishness, in my opinion … to be ordered to … how do you know, you, as an officer, how do you know what my needs are, if you don't live with me? You understand? Or if you barely talk to me? How can you command me to do so?

Lastly, Joseph concedes that despite not having a say in most decisions, when confronted with an issue over which he has no control, the army offers its utmost support. He indicates (line 479) that *"… jidderiġuk żgur, għall-għajnuna, mija fil-mija, tkun xi tkun il-problema…"* (They do direct you, a hundred percent, whatever the problem).

7 Christopher's Case

When I conducted the interview with Christopher, he portrayed himself as being a very composed individual. We carried out the interview in a calm and serene manner, however there were instances where I could hint that he was withholding information. Indeed, our discussion in relation to emotional trauma took a turn when the recording was off. I realised that he was more comfortable talking when knowing that his account was not to be used in the study than when the session was being audio-recorded.

Christopher stated that joining the army was more of a tradition to his family. Furthermore, he asserted that apart from tradition, his wish to join the military arose

after having witnessed a SAR mission at a young age. The focus of the interview then shifted towards the image that he had captured.

Christopher illustrated image 7, and reflected upon his first ever SAR mission. The participant claimed that despite having experienced far worse scenarios, his first SAR mission remains more vivid. He started off by giving details as to the difficulties they encountered, mainly due to the bad weather conditions and explained that the conditions of that day were very similar to the one illustrated in image 7. He acknowledged his fear of not making it alive to the casualty. He then described a graphic scenario of the victim, and explained that although he and his colleagues did their utmost to save this person, the victim did not make it. Christopher also recognised that he feels he was not prepared enough for that particular case, admitting that no theory and no hard practice had prepared him enough for such a scenario. Furthermore, Christopher claimed that regardless of the other incidents in which he was involved, his first case will always remain the one having affected him the most.

Image 7

An Approaching Storm

This impact has caused Christopher to change, with him admitting that he enjoys spending more time alone rather than with his loved ones. In this regard, the participants also stated that he often finds himself reflecting upon the happenings, which have disturbed him the most. Moreover, Christopher spoke about the sense of community that exists within the squadron, and claimed that he often discusses certain issues with his colleagues. He acknowledged that he feels more supported when discussing these matters at work, especially with colleagues who have undergone similar experiences and

feelings. In relation, he admitted to having always dealt with distress on his own, and thus, never looked for professional support. He also spoke about an increasing need of awareness related to mental health.

Throughout this interview, three themes were identified:

i)   Unpreparedness

ii)   A second family

iii)   Avoiding sharing own experiences

Each will be separately discussed in the next sections.

7.1 Unpreparedness

This theme will analyse instances whereby the participant made reference to a gap between theory and practice. Christopher first makes reference to this gap, during his narrative of his first SAR mission. He immediately acknowledges that no amount of training could have prepared him for what he witnessed on that day. He claims (lines 77-78) that *"Allavolja ttrejnjajna għal ħafna żmien, imma fil-verita' r-realta' hija differenti ħafna"* (The amount of time we spent on training was irrelevant, because in truth, reality is very different). Christopher also recounts that at the time, he felt very positive about his training, and went onboard with the mentality that all missions can be a success. He later acknowledges that this experience brought about an array of emotions, of which guilt was very prominent. He recounts:

"... aħna konna ilna nittrenjaw six months, kont għadni kif ħiereġ mit-training, u qisek tmur b'dik iċ-ċertu pożittivita' li ħa nġibu da żgur, ħa nsalvawh, fhimt? U meta tarah imut, allavolja naf li fil-verita' mhux tort	We had been training for six months, I had just finished my training, and kind of, you approach with a certain positivity, that you're going to surely save this person, you know? And when you see him dying, even though I know that it

tagħna, pero' il-guilt hemm tkun, fhimt?"   wasn't our fault, the guilt persists
(lines 108-111)

Christopher hints that he was not yet prepared for this responsibility and this lack of preparedness might have been the cause of the impact, which the incident caused. Later on in the interview, Christopher recounts that he had suffered from disturbed sleep for a number of nights following the incident. He reports:

"... ma kontx irqadt, dak il-lejl, dak li għetlek li affetwatni... ma kontx irqadt, issa jista' jkun ħabba adrenalina, pero' l-lejl ta' wara wkoll bagħtejt, u l-lejl ta' wara bagħtejt ukoll. Irqadt sew on the fourth day." (lines 126-129)	I did not sleep that night, the one I told you has affected me … I did not sleep, it could be because of the rush of adrenaline, but I struggled even the night after that, and the night after. I slept well on the fourth day

Christopher narrates another incident, in which a person had died by suicide. In contrast with the previous incident, he claims to have received enough information to prepare himself mentally prior to responding to this incident. He explains (lines 102-104) that *"Qisni kont qed nistenna x'inhu ġej għalijja għax qalulna li qabeż, u qisu l-moħħ tippreparah…"* (I felt like I knew what was coming, because they had informed us beforehand that he had jumped off, and I could prepare myself mentally). His account suggests that in Christopher's case, feelings of preparedness are very much related to the information that is priorly given. This information seems to help soldiers form a better mental picture of the situation and prepare themselves accordingly.

7.2 A Second Family

During the interview, Christopher often made reference to his colleagues and spoke of them as a second family. In particular, he portrays an image of harmony and belonging amongst the squadron. Remarks, which depict an environment concentrated

around companionship, whereby one individual can easily confide in another were frequently made, with Christopher referring to the squadron as his 'comfort zone'. This can be observed in the following excerpt:

"… inħoss ħafna comfort zone hawnhekk stess, li niftaħ qalbi ma' sħabi. Dik vera tajba aħna hawnhekk, u li jifhmuk. U jgħidulek l-esperjenzi tagħhom, tibda tgħid il-madoffi dak kemm kienu agħar minni jaħasra, kemm… kemm ra agħar minni, fhimt?" (lines 322-326)	I feel it's like a comfort zone over here, to open up with my colleagues. That's really good over here, and they can understand you. And they share their own experiences, then you realise that they have witnessed far worse than you have … far worse

It appears that this sense of belonging is not reflected solely in friendship, but also through a common understanding and appreciation of others' experiences. In fact, Christopher accounts that as a team, they frequently share their own experiences in an attempt to help others deal with distress. Surprisingly, this method of coping seems to be successful amongst the team. Christopher explains:

"…minn ċertu esperjenzi qisek tħossok komdu li titkellem ma' sħabek, u dik tgħin ħafna, għax aħna nifhmu lil xulxin peress li ngħaddu minn ċertu trawma … kollha kemm aħna bħala skwadra qisna għalina hija tajba, għax nifhmu lil xulxin, nitkellmu ma' xulxin u noħorġu minnha. Inkredibbli, imma hekk, hekk taħdem…" (lines 33-39)	You feel comfortable discussing certain situations with your colleagues, and that helps, because since we experience the same situations ... we can understand each other better… it is good for all of us as a team, because we understand each other, we talk to each other and we deal with it. It's incredible, but that is, that is how it works

In addition, Christopher admits to discussing issues with his team, particularly when feelings of weakness or guilt surface. Throughout the interview, Christopher hints at instances whereby such feelings arise. These are usually related either to the loss of a casualty or when doubt arises as to what and if anything could have been done differently. He recounts:

"... meta tagħmel rescue tħossok weak, tgħid għandi bżonn nitkellem naqra ma' sħabi biex nara jekk għamiltx sew, biex inneħħi dik il-guilt, ġieli, speċjalment tkun rescue naqra diffiċli..." (lines 338-340)

When you feel weak after a rescue, you feel the need to talk with your colleagues to assess whether you have performed well, to eliminate that guilt, sometimes, especially after a difficult rescue

Christopher reports that he feels at ease communicating his distress with various members of the team. He accounts that in some instances, he chooses to discuss matters with more than one member, in an attempt to get an extensive overview of the situation. He also concludes by claiming that coping with distress ought to come with a change in perspective surrounding trauma. He specifies that these traumas ought to be considered as part of the job, as they tend to occur repeatedly. He illustrates this in the following excerpt:

"... ma tkellimtx ma' persuna waħda... ħadt opinjoni m'għand nies t'esperjenza, li qegħdin magħna, m'għand wieħed anke tnejn, fhimt? U naħseb l-iktar ħaġa mportanti, li teħodha bħala xogħol, ma tridx teħoda bħala xi ħaġa qisha the end of the world, bħal speċi da, aħna xogħlna hekk, inkunu bejn ħajja u mewt, u tistennihom dawn l-affarijiet..." (lines 256-260)

I did not speak to just one person... I took the opinion of experienced colleagues, from one as well as two, you know? And the most important thing, I believe, is to consider it as just a job, you cannot consider it as the end of the world, kind of, this is our job, to be in between life and death, so you do expect to witness these things

Finally, Christopher acknowledges that communicating with someone who shares the same roles and responsibilities has been a sound coping mechanism. He explains:

"... eżempju jien, li xi ħadd jifhimni l-istess... fl-istess area, jiġifieri terġa bħala X, sibtha tajba jien..." (lines 454-455)

For example, I, to have someone who can understand me ... in my own area, as an X, I found it really helpful

7.3 Avoiding Sharing Own Experiences

In contrast with the previous theme, Christopher acknowledges that situations, which occur at the place of work are left unspoken of with family members. He gives various reasons as to why he chooses not to communicate his distress, including a lack of understanding and not wanting to startle his family about the reality of his job. He explains:

"… mat-tfajla tiegħi ma nitkellimx, għax ma nkunx irrid nallarmaha, jew m'ommi jew… ma' ħadd ma' nitkellem." (lines 131-133)	I do not discuss these with my partner, I don't want to startle her, or with my mother or… I don't talk about these with anyone

Consequently, Christopher explains that dealing with distress when not at work involves spending more time alone, doing activities that involve little to no human interaction, as portrayed in this excerpt:

"… ma jkollix aptit lil ħadd, letteralment, ikolli aptit noqgħod naqra wahdi, jew nibki naqra fil-karozza, immur x'imkien, nieħu kafe… ġieli nagħmilha, ikollok bżonnha…" (lines 203-205)	I wouldn't feel like having anyone around, literally, I'd feel the need to be on my own, either crying in the car, or go elsewhere, maybe have a coffee… I do it sometimes, I feel the need to

In addition, Christopher recognises that apart from not communicating with his family, choosing whether to share his experiences or not, depends upon his perceived impact of the incident. He remarks upon instances, which he felt have left no impact upon his life and claims:

"… ma kellix bżonn qisni nitkellem man-nies, minn xiex għaddejt…" (line 129)	I did not feel the need to discuss with others, what I had been through

These last statements suggest that there could be a lack of awareness with regards to the lasting impact of distressing memories, as he himself reports (line 412) *"... Jien naħseb li hawn bżonn iktar awareness…"* (I think there is need for more awareness).

8 Raymond's Case

When I first met Raymond at the debriefing session, he immediately enlightened me about their job and what role he plays within the squadron. Raymond appeared more than willing to share his experience, and indeed notified me that his interview might take more than an hour to complete. On the day of the interview, Raymond presented himself with far more material than he originally submitted in preparation to the interview. Raymond brought along reports submitted after the incidents, as well as video recordings, which could not be presented in this study, due to confidentiality reasons.

Raymond commenced the interview by giving reasons as to why he joined the army. He described having always aspired to join the military. He also gave an overview of his character, and described himself as being overtly hyper and overtalkative. The interview's focus then turned towards the images. Raymond put forward eleven images in total, of which nine will be portrayed in this study. The other two images were not captured by the participant himself, and thus were eliminated from this report.

The participant chose to firstly illustrate images 8 and 9. He made reference to one particular incident, which he claims he ought to have never conducted himself. Raymond described in detail how the SAR mission was conducted. He recounted leaving the squadron's premises at dusk, and arriving at the location of the incident in

total darkness. He recounts that his aircraft was not equipped to carry out SAR missions in the dark, and had in fact, put his and the lives of his colleagues in danger. Raymond narrated how they had eventually managed to rescue two divers, who had been battling the rough seas for the last ten hours. He also admitted that the landmark depicted in image 9 had, for a very long time, reminded him of nothing else lest the mission he had just described. Indeed, Raymond confessed that he must be the only individual on the island to feel glad that the landmark no longer exists. According to Raymond, this incident was so traumatic that even the thought of having endangered the lives of his colleagues brings back an array of distressing emotions.

Image 8

Sunset

Image 9

Gozitan Landmark

Raymond then shifted his attention onto image 10. He started off by explaining that it is very common for them having to carry out missions in dark conditions, similar to those depicted in image 10. He then correlated this image to image 9, and explained that on the day of the incident, his crew worked in such conditions, under the direction of just one pilot, as opposed to the two pilots sitting in the cockpit of the aircraft in image 10. According to Raymond, such an image also brings back memories of several other incidents, in which he was involved, particularly when his crew rescued a man who had been missing at sea for several days. He claimed that the version of the event

had been twisted by the media, and expressed frustration over not having been allowed to openly tell the general public how the events unfolded.

Image 10

Flying in Darkness

Raymond then put forth image 11. He explained that this particular image is symbolic of an upcoming storm. Raymond chose to describe in brief various incidents, which had occurred in dangerous weather, to which he admitted to experienc fear; fear of not making it back alive and of the hazards that he and his crew have to confront.

Image 11

Weather Front

At this point, Raymond requested to stop the interview for a short while. He explained that recounting such situations have troubled him and made him feel nervous and restless. Furthermore, he made remarks that had it not been for the purpose of this study, he would have not recounted these experiences to anyone.

When Raymond made it clear that he felt good enough to carry on, he displayed a set of images (images 12, 13 and 14), which he chose as a representation of two particular incidents. Raymond noted that both incidents had occurred at the same location as that portrayed in these images, with just a year apart. He recounted both events, highlighting the second incident more. Raymond recounted that a number of divers were involved, and despite having successfully carried out this mission in

dangerous weather, one of the divers did not make it out alive. Raymond explained that because of these, and other similar incidents, he no longer enjoys his pastime, i.e. diving and has frequent recollections of these experiences, especially when spotting an ambulance at the location where these incidents occurred. Furthermore, Raymond also accounted to the added pressures that these incidents caused, after he had to bear witness to this incident in court. In fact, Raymond added that stepping into court also brings back bad memories of these events.

Image 12

Divers
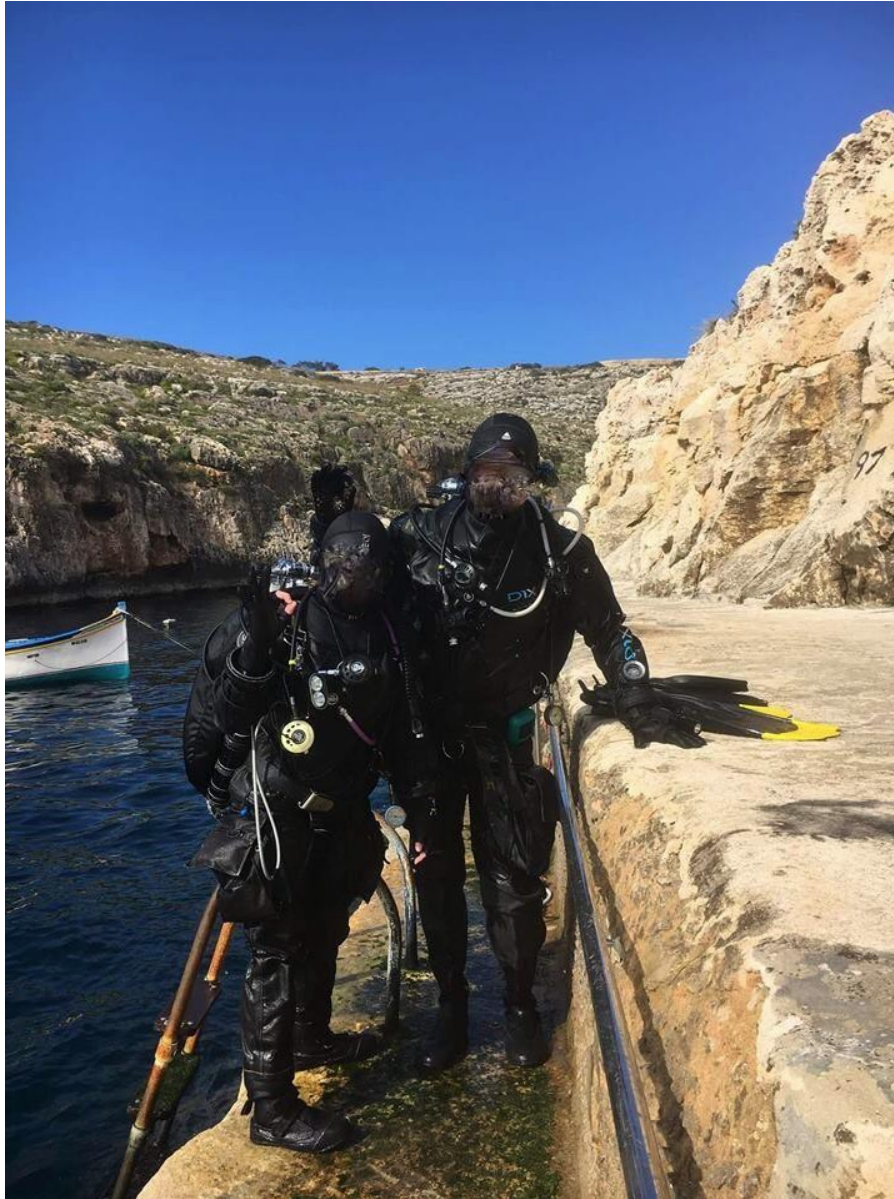
**Image 13**

Ambulance awaiting Casualty

Image 14

Maltese Landmark

Raymond then made reference to image 15. He reported that this boat reminds him of another SAR mission, in which a fisherman had to be rescued several miles away from the coast of Malta. Raymond then hinted that this incident left no particular impact, however, he then confessed that his son had bought a boat similar to the one in the photo. He stated that he cannot help but worry constantly that his son will one day get lost at sea, and that he will have to personally search for him.

Image 15

A Fisherman's Boat

Following this, Raymond accounted to several recovery missions, which involved the recovery of dead individuals. In particular, Raymond recounts an episode, which occurred at the location depicted in image 16. He explained that he used to enjoy visiting this place with his family, but has not been there ever since. He also accounted

to other instances, involving the death of illegal immigrants and gave various graphic descriptions of the conditions in which these individuals were recovered.

Image 16

Maltese Coastal Waters

In addition, Raymond expressed his frustrations at various organisational characteristics. Predominantly, he recounted instances whereby he was called into work on his days off and the busy schedule, which is imposed upon soldiers by members in higher positions. Raymond also illustrated the impact that his career has left upon his family. He signified the role that his wife plays in his life, and acknowledged her as being his major support system.

Raymond also dicussed issues related to his mental wellbeing, and admitted to feeling burnt out. He also confessed that despite wishing to spend some days off with his family, he is very reluctant to do so, due to the repercussons that such a move can cause.

In conclusion, Raymond acknowledged his need for professional support, however expressed his doubt over the available support systems.

Four themes were identified throughout this interview:

i)   Struggling with emotions

ii)   Acknowledging risk

iii)   Striving to keep healthy

iv)   Family support

The next sections will analyse each theme individually.

8.1 Struggling with Emotions

This theme looks at instances whereby Raymond acknowledged to have a difficult time dealing with distress. Throughout the interview, Raymond expresses several times that recounting these incidents brings back distressing memories. In relation, he claims to experience both mental and physical struggles. Indeed, Raymond reports (line 64) that *"... anke issa bħalissa jitlagħli l-bard meta qed nispjegalek..."* (Even now, at this moment, whilst I'm explaining this to you, I get goose pimples). He remarks this numerous times throughout the interview, and also explains that he feels a sense of darkness when recounting these experiences. Furthermore, Raymond reports that such recollections tend to have a lasting impact upon himself, and claims that it will take him a few days to get over the distress that this interview could have caused. At this stage, Raymond was reminded that he can choose to make use of the psychological support that was provided purposely for this study. This distress can be seen in the following excerpts:

"… nirrakkonta dawn l-istejjer jiena, ma tantx inħobb nitkellem fuqhom, qishom jifthuli ħafna… empty… erm, darkness, biex niftehmu jiġifieri…" (lines 460-462)	Recounting these experiences, I, I don't like talking about them, it's like they open up a lot of… empty… erm, darkness, kind of
"… jiena, kull meta ssemmili l-kelma X, anke jitlagħli ġismi xewk xewk… taffettwani ħafna ijwa. Jiena din, psikoloġikament naħseb… naħseb li mentalment din hija frustration għalija. Anke nitkellem u nsemmiha din, tant it… niġi ħażin…" (lines 164-168)	Everytime someone mentions the word X, I get pins and needles all over my body... it affects me a lot, yes. I think this, psychologically… I believe this is a big frustration mentally. Even if I talk and mention it… I feel dreadful
"...pero' jekk ħa nitkellem mat-terapiji, ma' terapista oħra fuq dawn l-affarijiet, I'd rather not ta at this stage, għax tant ftaħt…. Feriti… li dal-feriti illum għandi ġurnata naħseb fuqhom jien, forsi għada wkoll, forsi l-ġurnata ta' wara wkoll… it depends! Kemm hu b'saħħtu hawn (għal moħħu). It depends…" (lines 1096-1099)	But if I talk to other therapists about these situations, I'd rather not at this stage, because I opened up so many… wounds… I have the rest of the day thinking about these wounds, maybe even tomorrow, maybe even the day after… it depends! On how strong this (referring to his mind) is. It depends

Raymond recounts that even the thought of having to actually carry out the mission can cause distress. For Raymond, tension and nervousness appear to be the norm, particularly when receiving a call in the middle of the night. He explains that such feelings arise not just when on his days off, but also when on duty, and explains:

"… jiena kif nara telefon idoqq u nkun rieqed, għid li ħa ninħasad, kważi, kważi jaqbdek il-... tirtriegħed minn ġewwa…" (lines 269-271)	When the phone rings and I am asleep, I get startled, I almost get… shivers

Furthermore, the participant expresses being afraid and tormented by the events he was involved in. He relates these to images 10 and 11 and describes an array of emotions, which these events have brought about, including a constant recollection of these events, as described in the following:

"… Jiġifieri kif immur intir jiena, u ħa nara dak quddiemi… bilfors nibża', bilfors. Jien għandi esperjenzi koroh fuqhom dawn, kif tista' ma… kif tista' jiena… they're gonna be an impact all my life, dejjem… ma nistax ma… ma niftakarx fihom…" (lines 452-457)

As soon as I fly, and witness that in front of my eyes… I feel afraid. I have very bad memories surrounding these, how can… how can I … they're gonna be an impact all my life, always… I cannot… not think about them

When questioned as to how he manages to cope with such suffering, Raymond acknowledges that it remains a mystery to him. He reports to finding satisfaction in flying and somehow manages to cancel all these thoughts when doing something related. He explains:

"Appena tinżel l-art, titfi l-helicopter u tiġi hawn tieħu bela' te', they will come back to you. Forsi moħħok kapaċi jikkanċella? Naħseb. Imma jien għadni ma nistax nifhem kif jirnexxieli nagħmilha…" (lines 910-912)

As soona s I switch off the helicopter and come for a cup of tea, they all come back to me. Maybe the mind can cancel everything? I think so. But I am still unable to understand how I manage to do it

Nevertheless, the temporary elimination of such recollections appears to be insufficient for Raymond. He acknowledges being in a position of mental instability, and owes his keeping himself together to his strong character:

"… jiena qiegħed f'conditions li if I'm not gonna do something about this, it's gonna be bad on me. Naf… pero' għandi karattru sod…" (lines 1040-1042)

I am currently in a condition, that if I'm not gonna do something about this, it's gonna be bad on me. I know… but I have a strong character

Towards the end of the interview, Raymond admits to having pursued professional help, despite him having doubts over what the current services can offer. Raymond explains that he feels he has no other option, and prefers to grab whatever is available than deal with his distress on his own. He uses a proverb to describe this position:

"… Mill-bidu għedtlek I don't know

I told you right form the beginning

what this might have. Pero' inti qatt ma smajt bil-proverbju meta tkun qed tegħreq taqbad ma l-iktar tibna li hemm fil-wiċċ, tipprova meta tkun qed tegħreq taqbad ma' tibna li jkun hemm fil-wiċċ…tibna mhix ħa żżommok. That's what I'm gonna do…" (lines 1222-1226)

that I don't know what this might have. But, haven't you ever heard of the proverb that when you are drowning, you clutch at a straw, you try to clutch to a floating straw if you're drowning… a straw won't hold you. That's what I'm gonna do

8.2 Acknowledging Risk

The dangerous conditions in which most missions need to be carried out were also made reference to by Raymond. In addition, he made use of image 11 to describe one of the numerous possible situations that can be encountered. Raymond acknowledges the dangers that the job carries with it, and states (line 730) *"… tant hu riskjuż il-flying, tant jistgħu jinqalgħulek affarijiet ħżiena…"* (Flying is very dangerous, so many things can go wrong). Similarly to other participants, Raymond accounts to various situations that can pose a threat to themselves. In particular, he makes reference to images 8 and 9 to describe an event, which still torments him to this day. He describes the conditions as follows:

"… jiġifieri ħa mmur u nasal hemm dlam ċappa, għax jien kont naf li sakemm nasal hemm għandi fifteen minutes. Ir-riħ kien forza 8, riħ qawwi, u żewġ divers mitlufin. Jiena tlaqt f'dal-conditions. Meta rajt dal-conditions jien, indunajd li ħa nasal hemm fid-dlam. Wasalt fid-dlam…" (lines 87-91)

So I go, and arrive there in darkness, because I knew that by the time I get there, fifteen minutes will go by. The wind was force 8, very strong, and two missing divers. I left in these conditions. When I saw these conditions, I, I knew I'd get there in darkness. I arrived in darkness

"… kelli nitla' minn X biex niftehmu, f'dawk il-kundizzjonijiet, la naf jekk kienx mgħawweg u lanqas jien dritt…" (lines 223-225)

I had to get out from X, so as to understand better, in those conditions, not knowing whether it was inclined or straight

Throughout the duration of the interview, Raymond made several indirect remarks as to future doubts and uncertainties. Raymond firstly made such a statement when discussing matters of safety within the incident. In this part of the interview, Raymond recounts an incident, in which his colleagues were involved. He hints at feeling fearful and anxious that one day, such an experience might also trespass him. He clearly states that despite ongoing training, such an event will most likely occur in the future. He recognises this by stating (line 800) *"…Jaf immur u mmut issa ta' jiġifieri…"* (I might go and die right now). According to Raymond, such feelings are born out of fear that he will never see his family again. He states:

"Ħa nerġa' narahom lill-mara u t-tfal wara li jiġri da kollu?" (lines 796-797)	Am I going to see my wife and children again, after all of this?

Raymond's statements give the impression that the anguish which these thoughts cause are also conveyed onto family members. He reports that he deals with this apprehension by letting his wife know when he departs and when he arrives back on land. This behaviour appears to ease his uneasiness, and possibly even that of his wife. He reports:

"… inċemplilha l-mara, ngħidilha ħa mmur intir ta, inċempillek kif ninżel, mhux ħa ndum siegħa u nofs, sagħtejn… ħalli ma toqgħodx tieħu ħsieb. Kif ninżel mill-ewwel, l-ewwel li nagħmel inċempel lill-mara biex ngħidilha li ġejt lura. Jiġifieri din hija sejjer f'kundizzjonijiet inti li forsi intom in-nies li ma tgħaddux minnha ma tafuhiex. Jiena dejjem, bħal kulħadd hawn ġew… hemm riskju li ħa niġi lura mejjet, jew ma niġix. Tmur mitejn, mija u tmenin, mija u għoxrin mil, qed ngħaġġibhom… mija u għoxrin mil, mija u erbgħin mil, jista' jkun tmurli magna, taqa' l-baħar… min ħa jsibni?"	I phone my wife, I tell her I'm going flying, I'll phone when I get back, I won't be long, an hour and a half, two hours… so she won't have to be concerned. As soon as I get back, I phone her immediately, to let her know I''m back. So, this thing, of going out in conditions, that maybe people who don't experience this don't know about. I always, like everyone in here … there's a risk that I come back dead, or that I don't come back at all. If I go two hundre, a hundred eighty, a hundred twenty miles, I'm exhaggerating… a hundred twenty miles, hundred fourty

(lines 736-744)   miles away… maybe the engine comes off … who will find me?

During the interview, issues as to how Raymond strives to maintain his mental wellbeing were also discussed. These will be analysed in the next section.

8.3 Striving to Keep Healthy

In relation to the previous themes, Raymond expresses his struggles in finding means and ways to distract himself from such recollections and deal with the weariness that his role causes. Raymond explains that he used to enjoy diving, however, he no longer engages in this pastime, because of the distressing memories. He also expresses this through image 12 and explains:

"… Jiena għandi l-paddy license, immur nodgħos, kont immur nodgħos ħa f'si… f'sena kont immur għoxrin, ħamsa u għoxrin darba, recreational tiegħi… li ħabba dawn it-tip ta' kundizzjonijiet li jiena qed intella' d-divers mill-baħar, mejtin… l-isports tiegħi kif tridni mmur nagħmlu meta jiena mġarrab ħafna?"
(lines 526-534)

I have the paddy license, to go diving, I used to go diving… I used to go twenty, twentyfive times in a year, as a hobby…how can I practice this sports, when I feel devastated because of recovering dead individuals?

Being conscious of such emotional turmoil, Raymond reports to doing his utmost to try and ignore such happenings. He remarks (lines 611) that *"… Nipprova ninsiha, nipprova ninsiha…"* (I try to forget it; I try to forget it). He also makes reference at how these recollections affect him and hints at mechanisms that he uses in an attempt to cope with these memories:

"Tipprova tinjorah, tipprova trabbi qoxra, tgħid teliminahom dawn, tgħid dawn mhux vera, dawn mhux nies…"
(lines 623-624)

You try to ignore it, grow a hard skin, you try to eliminate them, and tell yourself they are not real, they are not people

Raymond reveals that despite his efforts to forget these experiences, certain situations still bring about such recollections. He makes reference to an incident, which was years later turned into a movie. He remarks that he will never watch this movie, despite his passion for films. He explains:

"… fuq X inħadem film. Kemm hu sabiħ, morru arawh. Jien ma rajtux, mhux ħa narah… jiena ħa, jiena kont… dak il-wieħed li ħdimt f'X fil-verita'… nista' mmur narah il-film jien?! Le, użgur li le…" (lines 643-646)

A film was made about X. It's very good, you should go watch it. I did not watch it, and will not watch it… I was… the one who worked in X in reality… can I watch this movie? Of course not

According to Raymond, keeping himself healthy entails various factors, one of which is sleep. He reports that he encounters difficulties in sleeping, especially when on duty:

"… aħna hawnhekk inbatu ħafna. Jien inbati ħafna, biex norqod speċjalment, għax din, din oħra… li tbiddel is-sodda kull, kull tlett ijiem, diffiċli…" (lines 887-889)

We suffer a lot over here. I suffer a lot, especially to sleep, because this is another thing… to change bed every three days, it's difficult

In conclusion, Raymond acknowledges himself as being a changed person. He claims to having deteriorated both physically and mentally, and compares his current self to a younger version of himself, as depicted in the following excerpt:

"… Inbdilt, iwa inbdilt. Jista' jkun… jien naħseb il-medical conditions tiegħi m'għadhomx kif kienu għoxrin sena ilu. Tgħidli mhux bilfors kellek għoxrin sena, ħamsa u għoxrin sena… mentalment naħseb jien, mentalment kont iktar b'saħħti 20 years ago milli llum, wara dawk l-esperjenzi kollha…" (lines 976-981)

I've changed, yes, I've changed… I think my medical conditions are not the same as they were twenty years ago. You'd tell me it's obvious, I am no longer twenty, twentyfive years old… mentally, I believe, mentally I was much stronger twenty years ago than I am today, after all these experiences

In doing his utmost to cope with these traumas, Raymond finally admits to having looked for professional support. Nothwithstanding, this was not an easy step for Raymond to take. He reports having discussed these matters with his doctor, and reached the conclusion of getting professional assistance.

8.4 Family Support

The significance of the family's role in providing emotional support was portrayed towards the end of the interview. Raymond makes special reference to his wife, who appears to be his main support system. He describes the relationship that each wife ought to have with her husband and claims (line1287) *"... il-mara trid tkun id f'id miegħek…"* (The wife has to work hand in hand with you). He acknowledges his wife's determination to support him, and reports that as long as this is not an issue for her, then it shall not be for him:

"... jekk mhix problema għall-mara, mhix problema għalija. Jekk problema għall-mara, ten times għalija. Dik hi, jiġifieri t-terapija hija, trid tiġi mid-dar…" (lines 1293-1295)	If it's not a problem for my wife, it's not a problem for me. If it's a problem for my wife, it's ten times more for me. That's it, so therapy has to start from home

Raymond makes use of a methapor to describe how he feels in relation to such support. He explains:

"... Qisek għandek borża tqila, jew żewġ basktijiet tqal, taqbad teħodlok waħda minnhom, tgħidlek ħa nġorrielek jien, dik hi l-verita'. U minn hemm, inti relieved, toħroġ minnha…" (lines 1313-1316)	It's like having a very heavy sack, or two heavy bags, and she just grabs one of them, and tells you that she will carry it for you, that's the truth. And you emerge feeling relieved

Furthermore, the participant accounts that the support offered by family members is costless. He asserts this by stating that they have a good understanding of what

encourages and disheartens him, and do their utmost to distract him from his own thoughts. He describes:

"... In-nies tad-dar jgħinuk toħroġ minnha l-problema, speċjalment il-mara, u t-tfal, dawk jgħinuk toħroġ minnha, għax they see you down, jarawk down... ikunu jafu li int għaddej minn xi ħaġa, u jgħinuk toħroġ minnha. Jgħinuk... il-mara, sempliċement, tkun down iġġiblek bela' te... ukoll it's something good. Jew tgħidlek isma' llum ħerġin ħa mmorru hemmhekk, biex inti taqbad tinsa..."
(lines 1278-1283)

Your family helps you deal with the problem, especially your wife and children, they help you deal with it, because they see you down, they see you down... they'd know you're going through something and help you deal with it. They help you... your wife, she sees you down, and simply brings you a cup of tea... it's something good. Or tells you today we're going out, to help you forget

Nevertheless, Raymond declares that such support does not come without its own burdens. He explains the costs of such support and expresses that his wife must take on the added load of his own problems. Raymond declares (lines 1300-1301) *"...l-iktar li qegħda ġġorr problemi l-mara, mhux jien. Il-mara tiegħi iktar qed iġġorr problemi, għax dik qegħda ġġorr il-problemi tiegħi...."* (My wife is the one who carries most problems, not me. My wife carries more problems, because she also carries mine).

9 Vince's Case

As soon as we met, Vince instantly stated that he had not thought of any imagery, which could be presented for this study. He claimed that whatever was representative of trauma to him could not be captured on an image. When asked further, Vince disclosed that only a particular smell reminds him of traumatic experiences, a characteristic that was further discussed throughout the interview.

The interview commenced with Vince giving a clear explanation of the different roles within the squadron, and the specific tasks that he undertakes. He also made it a

point to mention his hobby and how he managed to relate various aspects of his job with his hobby. The participant then shifted his attention towards numerous incidents, which he expressed as having left an impact upon him. In particular, he mentions an event, of which he was not participant. Vince recounted that he had seen an image of a casualty who had suffered from serious burns all over his body and remained impressed when his colleagues had informed him that the casualty had spoken his last words to his partner, knowing that he would not make it. He also narrated an incident, in which several people had died in an explosion, of which there was a couple and another person, whose daughter was waiting for him at home to celebrate her birthday. Vince noted that it is not the case itself that impresses him, but rather, the anguish that their relatives have to endure following the accident.

Vince then explained the kind of smell which reminds him of these traumatic incidents. He explained that it is not the smell of burning pyrotechnics, which brings about distressing memories, but rather, the particular smell that forms due to burning material, be it grass, carton or any other substance. Vince explained that this smell has a particular odour, and it is this that brings back memories of distressing events. He also explained that this smell causes him to reflect, and frequently ask himself whether he will one day be the victim of a fireworks' explosion.

The participant described how he has changed, ever since working within the AFM. He acknowledged to becoming more aware of the dangers involved, however, expressed no fear over performing his hobby. He also admitted to reflecting about the incidents, however, claimed that he never experienced any symptoms of trauma or stress. When asked regarding his views on professional support, Vince confessed that he

had already looked for support, at a time when he was going through a difficult period in his personal life. Furthermore, Vince acknowledged that if need be, he would find no difficulty in pursuing professional assistance. Unlike other participants, Vince claimed that it is not the norm for members of the squadron to look out for each other in times of distress. Although there appears to be a support system in place, in that junior staff are well-trained by senior soldiers, elements of trauma are not discussed with each other.

Three themes emerged from this interview:

i) Being impressed by the case

ii) Risk and vulnerability

iii) Supportive entities

Each theme will be analysed in the next sections.

9.1 Being Impressed by the Case

This theme will analyse instances whereby Vince admits to being influenced by the incidents at work. Throughout the interview, Vince made several statements that rather than being impressed by the horrible burns and injuries sustained by the victims, he feels more affected when knowing that the casualty's relatives will then have to deal with the grief of their loss. Vince states (line 270) *"... li jimpressjonani, min baqa' hawnhekk, għax fil-verita' dawk in-nies qed jgħixu..."* (Whoever stays behind impresses me most, because in reality, they are the ones who still live). Vince recounts varies instances related to such statement.

Vince starts by describing an incident, in which he was not involved. He explains that even the thought of the casualty knowing that he will die soon has left its impact. He states:

"...impressjonajt ruħi, għax dan kien għadu ħaj u... kien hemm il-mara, il-partner tiegħu, jiġifieri, taħdem hemm ... beda jitkellem mal-familjari tiegħu, ma' sħabu, u jgħidilhom illum l-aħħar li ħa narakom, għax kien jaf li qiegħed maħruq sew, fhimt? U, impressjonajt ruħi." (lines 61-68)

... was left impressed, because he was still alive, and … his wife was there, his partner used to work there ... he was talking with his relatives, his friends, and telling them today is the last day that I shall see you, because he knew he was badly burnt, you know? I was impressed

In another incident, Vince accounts to the loss of several members of a family, especially a father, whose daughter was celebrating her birthday on the day of the incident. He recounts:

"... niftakar, tibqa', tibqa' timpressjonani... l-ewwel ħaġa, għax hija xi ħaġa ta' familja u nqerdu ħafna membri ta' familja. Raġuni oħra li nibqa' niftakarha, għax kien hemm persuna minnhom, it-tifla tiegħu kellha l-birthday u bdew jistennewh biex jaqsmu l-kejk, ġej ġej ġej, u dak baqa' ma mar qatt. Erm, u nimpressjona ruħi wkoll, għax dil-mara u r-raġel tagħha mietu flimkien, jiġifieri dawn kienu bilqegħda flimkien u saret l-isplużjoni..." (lines 102-108)

I remember, it will keep on affecting me … first of all, because it involved a family, and many family members were lost. Another reason as to why I will always remember it, there was a person, whose daughter had her birthday, and they were waiting for him to cut the cake and he never showed up. Erm, and it affected me too, because this woman, and her husband died together, they were sitting together at the time when the explosion occurred

Vince makes reference to another incident, in which a father had to witness an explosion, which killed his son. He explains that personally, he considers the father to be another victim of the tragedy. Vince acknowledges the gruesome conditions in which the casualties end up, however, confesses to expressing more sentiments towards the living. He explains:

"... Rajthom it-tnejn li huma u kienu

I had seen both of them and they were in

f'kundizzjonijiet ħżiena ħafna. Imma minn dak kollha, dik l-iktar li ftakart. Għax dak (għall-missier) mar id-dar flgħaxija, missieru, isaqqaf wiċċu mal-funeral.... għandu l-memorji biss issa... dawk jimpressjonawni, għax, orrajt, bniedem maħruq, tarah, kerha ħafna. Imma, il-ġisem mingħajr il-ħajja m'huwa xejn. In-nies li għadhom bil-ħajja hawnhekk, qed iweġġgħu u jbatu, allura qisni dawk li, bħal speċi, affettwani, fis-sens li... inħoss ghalihom l-iktar, fhimt?" (lines 283-290)

very bad conditions. But, from all of that, that's what I remember the most. Because he (referring to the father) went home in the evening, having to confront the funeral… he only had memories left… that is what impresses me most, because, a burnt person, is very gruesome to witness. But, a body without life is nothing. Those who are left alive keep on suffering, so that is what affects me, in the sense… I feel mostly for them, you understand?

Besides expressing concern and genuine grief towards the victims' relatives, Vince also acknowledges the grisly scenarios, in which they need to work. The participant claims that these situations also leave a mark, as they are not frequently witnessed in real life. He further relates them to movie scenes, declaring that they tend to be even worse, as can be seen in this excerpt:

"… U niftakar, bdejna nimxu jiġifieri u nsibu, biċċiet, sfortunatament, ta' nies. Dawk, ma ninsihom qatt, għax mhux affarijiet li tara kuljum. Kważi kważi lanqas fuq il-films ma tarahom. Fir-realta' tarahom, sfortunatament…" (lines 120-123)

And I remember us walking, and finding various body parts, unfortunately. Those, I can never forget, because you do not see these every day. You don't even see these in movies. Unfortunately, you witness these in reality

Lastly, Vince also acknowledges his colleagues' experiences, and declares that an aura of melancholy persists following an incident. In lines 293-295, Vince claims *"... kulħadd qas jiftaħ ħalqu... tinħasel u titfa' l-affarijiet f'posthom, u jiġifieri kulħadd ikun qiegħed ħażin... dak il-lejl, speċjalment…"* (We would all be speechless… you'd take a shower, put everything in place, and everyone would be downhearted… especially on that night).

9.2 Risk and Vulnerability

Issues of risk and placing oneself in vulnerable situations were also evident during the interview. One notes that the job, in itself, poses a certain degree of risk upon these individuals. Associated with Vince's job, he remarks upon the importance of thoroughly assessing the nearby environment prior to conducting the recovery mission. He reflects upon some of the dangers they might encounter and notes (lines 117-118) *"… ikun għad hemm l-isplussiv għadu qed jaqbad, u jkun id-dlam…"* (There would still be explosive burning, and it would be dark). Vince reports that through his job, he has become more wary of the dangers that even minimal mistakes can set off. He claims:

"… li nbidel minni, li meta mmur il-post tan-nar bħala delizzju, qisni naf xi jwassal …" (lines 247-248)	What I feel has changed, is that whenever I go to the fireworks factory, as a hobby, I am more aware of what can lead to what

Having witnessed an aptitude of incidents, Vince makes several statements as to how this has affected him. Noteworthy are his remarks of having become more aware of the dangers involved. He states (line 227) that *"… inħossni aware ħafna…"* (I feel much more aware). According to Vince, having a passion for pyrotechnics has helped him become more conscious during recovery missions involving the explosion of a pyrotechnic factory. He states (line 40) *"… jekk għall-argument tmur f'accident, jiena nkun aware ħafna iktar…"* (If, for example, I call out to an accident, I'd be much more aware). He also confesses to considering each case as a learning opportunity for himself and exercises cautiousness so as not to repeat the same mistakes that caused previous incidents. He explains:

"… meta tara inti, fhimt, tgħid dak ġara hekk, mela aħjar ma nagħmilx hekk, fhimt?" (lines 46-47)	When you witness it yourself, you tell yourself that this happened, so it's better if I don't do that, you know?

317

According to Vince, these incidents often make him reflect upon his hobby. He admits that when he was younger, he was more adamant to the risks involved. However, he has now gained a wider perspective of such dangers and admits to feeling perturbed by his thoughts. Conversely, he explains that despite the risks involved, he still chooses to engage in pyrotechnics:

"… ngħid istra allaħares jinqalali xi ħaġa għax ara x'ħa nħalli warajja. Imma, fl-aħħar mill-aħħar hemm terġa', jerġa' jieħdok, għax sabiħ… ħafna sabiħ…" (lines 78-81)	I pray nothing happens to me, because of all that I leave behind. But at the end of the day, that is where I end up again, because it's pleasant … really pleasant

Vince also acknowledges that he often finds himself reflecting upon the risks involved in his pastime. Knowing that severe injuries and even death can be sustained through said hobby, Vince reflects upon whether and when he might be its victim. He explains:

"Dejjem tara esperjenza ta' ħaddiehor, imbagħad, jiġifieri tgħid, ħa jmissni lili? Meta ħa jmissni lili? Għax kulħadd, min inħaraq, kulħadd xi darba ra esperjenza ta' ħaddiehor u ma basarx li ħa jmiss lilu." (lines 192-194)	You always observe others' experiences, then you ask, will it ever happen to me? When will it happen to me? Because everyone, all those who got burnt, had witnessed someone else's experience and never thought one day it will be him

9.3 Supportive Entities

This theme will incorporate any observations made by the participant in relation to his perception and views to professional support. Vince makes a number of statements, in which he hints that as a squadron, issues of distress related to past experiences are only made reference to when training junior soldiers. Indeed, he states

(lines 406-407) *"... Rari nitkellmu fuq dawn l-affarijiet, jekk affettwawkx ħażin, fis-sens..."* (We rarely talk about these things, about whether they have left a negative impact). He explains this further in the following excerpt:

"... mhux xi ħaġa komuni jgħidlek jiena affettwatni ħażin, jew impressjonajt ruħi... Forsi dak li jkun jaf żammha għalih u qatt ma' tkellem ma' ħadd, għax forsi issa ħa, jew forsi jidher weak, fhimt?" (lines 409-414)	It's not common for someone to tell you that it has negatively affected him... Maybe that person might have kept it to himself and never disclosed it with anyone, because maybe he'd be seen as weak

Vince acknowledges that, similar to him, his colleagues carry numerous burdens, of which not all may be related to the place of work. Vince perceives that it is the right of all employees to be offered a service that can be pursued as they deem best. Furthermore, he comments that this instils a sense of not being just a number, but rather, that the organisation is attentive to the needs of its employees. He comments:

"... jekk taf li għandek is-servizz, tħossok li... ara jinteressahom minni." (lines 390-391)	If you know that you have that service, you'd think … they are interested in my wellbeing

In addition, Vince also recounts his experience of having obtained professional support, at a time when he had difficulties in his personal life. He confesses that after just one session, he discovered that he had numerous solutions for his problem. Vince makes several remarks in favour of professional support, and gives reasons:

"... nemmen li jekk tmur titkellem, qed issib wens, l-ewwel ħaġa, u ħa tieħu parir kif tista', jew kif tihhandiljahom dawn l-affarijiet..." (lines 451-453)	I believe that if you do speak out, you'll primarily find comfort, and you'll also get advice of how to handle these circumstances

In conclusion, he also chose to discuss whether professional support can be provided best by someone within the military or an outside entity. Vince clearly states

that the military concept is very difficult to grasp, especially by common civilians. He affirms that the system is ingrained into the person upon training, and remains with that person for a lifetime. Such remarks can be observed in the following excerpts:

"… is-sistema tal-army, trid tesperjenzaha biex tifhimha, u jien lanqas nista' nfehmielek, onestament, għax… is-sistema hija sistema, tidħol rekluta u tidħol ġo fik… idaħħluha ġo fik…" (lines 430-432)	You have to experience the military system in order to understand it, and I cannot even explain it to you, honestly, because … the system is a system, it becomes ingrained once you join the army … they embed it in you

Conversely, he later claims that it is more difficult to engage a soldier into help-seeking behaviour if the person offering support works within the military. He concludes the interview by affirming that whatever the circumstances, professional support ought to be provided by an entity that has sound knowledge of the military.

10 Michael's Case

I met Michael for the first time upon the premises of his squadron on the day of the interview. Michael had immediately accepted to participate, and also informed me that he might not be able to capture any images, claiming that he found it easier to discuss matters of trauma than illustrate them in an image. Indeed, on the day of the interview, no images were put forth by Michael.

Michael commenced the interview by giving a brief overview of himself. He described himself as being an adventurous person, who enjoys participating in high-risk events. Michael also gave an overview of his experience in a foreign country, during which he described as having felt like a true soldier. Michael explained the hardships he endured and the challenges he had to tackle both prior and during this experience.

The participant also gave details about his role within the squadron and briefly explained the daily tasks, which each member is expected to carry out. Michael then focused upon the experiences, which he remembers the most. He explained that despite having a clear recollection of such events, he feels that these have not left any impact upon himself. He also illustrated several events, during which he and his colleagues were in danger and explained that it is only through trusting other colleagues that such situations do not result in loss of lives. Michael then focused upon the discipline that the army instilled in him and the challenges currently encountered by the local military.

Michael also gave his views with regards to professional support. He was clear in expressing that he prefers to deal with his situations on his own and would rather opt for support offered by his colleagues. Michael clarified that he discusses these matters with other senior members of staff, and gives newer members the time and space required to divulge their feelings. In conclusion, he also depicted several stress factors, which increase the burden carried by these soldiers and acknowledged that each crew member is unique and deals with such situations differently.

Three themes emerged from this interview:

i)   Professional development

ii)   Being at risk

iii)   Perceived lack of trauma

These themes will be analysed next.

10.1 Professional Development

Instances whereby learning opportunities provided by the AFM were illustrated, were numerous. Michael portrays two different types of learning opportunities, those provided by the organisation itself, such as formal training and training in foreign countries, and informal learning, as passed on from senior members of staff to junior members. In relation to the former type of learning, Michael states (lines 64-65) *"...Hawnhekk na... immorru training barra minn Malta..."* (Over here, we carry out training abroad). The participant recounts his experience abroad, particularly the challenges and tough training, which he underwent prior to such an experience. He recounts:

"... Allura jiena ridt nitgħallem... għall-affarijiet tal-first aide under pressure, ġo tactical situation, plus tactical things kollha li jagħmlu l-oħrajn. Kulma kelli ċans huwa six months, kelli nitlaq minn hawn sitt xhur, u nlaħħaq dawn iż-żewġ affarijiet kollha f'daqqa jiena, biex nitla' hemmhekk. U kienet vera under tension għalijja. Under tension mhux għax sejjer hemm, li ridt inlaħħaq ma' dawn in-nies jien, biex inkun daqshom, għax inkella ma titlax." (lines 77-83)	So I had to learn… how to perform first aide under pressure, in a tactical situation, and all the other tactical things that the other staff do. I only had six months' time, so I had to leave the squadron for six months, and handling both these things at once, in order for me to go. It was very stressful. Very stressdul, not because I was going there, but because I had to make up with all the other members, otherwise I couldn't go

When discussing issues of informal training, Michael expresses using his experiences to teach junior members of staff what should and should not be done in various situations. He clarifies that even though being frequent, it is only in such instances that he talks about these events. Michael explains:

"... Anke biex ngħallmu liż-żgħar, minn xiex jistgħu jiltaqgħu... u tipprova tgħallimhom. Tirrakkontalhom l-istorja u tipprova tgħallimhom minnha stess, x'lesti li jfittxu fhimt, u kif jittekiljawha l-	Even to teach the junior staff, what they can come across… and you try to teach them. You recount your stories and try to teach them from your own experiences, what they need to look out for, and how

bičča xogħol, qed tifhem?" (lines 218-   to handle the situation, you understand?
222)

Michael elucidates that through informal learning, junior members of the team eventually learn to make their own decisions and build upon their knowledge. He explains that there are only a few senior members of staff left within the squadron, and highlights the importance of passing on such knowledge to newer members:

"… mill-ftit esperjenzi li għandna aħna, li jiena u sitta oħra minn sħabi, aħna il-kbar t'hawnhekk, tal-X, issa, għax kollha żgħar… tistgħu titgħallmu mill-ftit li tgħallimna aħna hux…" (lines 632-635)

From the experiences that we have, that me and another six of my colleagues, who are all seniors of the X squadron, because they are all young now … they can learn from what we have learned

In conclusion, Michael declares that he chooses to put junior members of staff on the forefront of various missions, with the intent of letting them learn independently. He describes:

"Bgħatt iż-żgħar jagħmluha… il-ġodda, ħa jitgħallmu, fhimt. Ħa jitgħallmu huma, fhimt?" (lines 228-230)

I sent the juniors to do it… the juniors, so they can learn. So they can learn themselves, you understand?

Conversely, Michael acknowledges situations that can be difficult for new crew to handle, and explains that he makes himself available in such circumstances. Situations which can prove to be of risk will be analysed in the next section.

10.2 Being at Risk

The dangers posed by the job itself and the risks, which Michael puts himself in were also recognised in the interview. Being an adventurous person, Michael recounts various instances, whereby he acknowledges the dangerous conditions that he poses upon himself. Moreover, Michael puts forth situations at work, which also pose a significant amount of danger upon the team. He states (line 323) *"… inti dejjem fil-*

periklu, dejjem, dejjem… dejjem fil-periklu inti. Dejjem, dejjem." (You are always in danger, always, always… always in danger. Always, always). He narrates various circumstances, to get his point across, and acknowledges situations, whereby his life and that of other team members were on the line. Predominantly, he illustrates one specific event, in which he, half-heartedly states (line 369) *"… spiċċajna konna ħa nitilfu wieħed…"* (We were going to lose one of us). Although Michael states several times throughout the interview that he feels he has not been affected by such circumstances, his body language and facial expressions during this part, suggest otherwise. His tone of voice hints at feelings of disappointment and fear, disappointment at how the events unfolded and fear of actually losing a member of the team.

Lastly, Michael acknowledges the dangers that they frequently encounter. He adds that as a soldier, one must have courage and show bravery, especially in situations, whereby one small mistake, could cost own life and that of others. He states:

"… jrid ikollok il-gazz tmur wiċċek ma' bomba taħt karozza…" (lines 314-315)	You need to be courageous to go face to face with a bomb, under a car

10.3 Perceived Lack of Trauma

Michael hints at the lack of distress caused by these incidents at several instances throughout the interview. He recounts these instances and claims (lines 208) "… jiena naħseb jiena minix normali mhux il-każijiet…" (I believe I am not normal, not these incidents). Conversely, Michael adds that when faced with these circustamces, he tends to perform better. He claims to be able to make more informed choices when confronted with such circumstances, and notes:

"… Jiena dawn l-affarijiet letteralment… moħħi jibda jaħdem iktar tajjeb meta jkun hemm dawn l-affarijiet. Issa ma nafx min hu l-ħażin jien, fis-sens… jien ma jagħmluli xejn, fhimt…. Rajt bniedem mejjet jien… ma ġara, ma ġara xejn, fhimt…" (lines 211-214)

These things, literally… my mind works better when faced with these situations. I don't know who is flawed, in the sense… they do not affect me, you understand … When I see a dead person, it's like nothing happened

The participant insists further that these events have left no significant impact, and remarks frequently (line 256) *"… mhux li biddluli lili nnifsi…"* (They have not changed me). Unsurprisingly, such view often prompts Michael to reflect upon himself and he admits to asking whether such lack of influence makes him appear as a bad person. He confesses:

"… Xi kultant noqgħod insaqsi jien… Min hu l-ħażin, jekk hux jien il-ħażin, li per eżempju mmur fuq…. U ma jagħmilli l-ebda effetti…" (lines 613-615)

Sometimes I do ask myself… who is unfit, if it is me that's unfit, that I go, for example… and it does not affect me

In contrast to this theme, theme 4.3.10.1 identified instances whereby Michael states that he often recounts these experiences to junior staff. This remark contrasts drastically with Michael's perception that these distressing incidents have not affected him emotionally. One wonders why and how certain situations could be recollected by Michael more easily than others. The use of further probing and challenging queries, proved inaffective in eliciting further responses. As predicted, when discussing matters of professional support, Michael explained that he feels he does not need to engage in such services, and prefers to manage his ordeal on his own.