Drug abuse is a significant problem across the United States, and its repercussions are wide-reaching and impact far more than just the drug user. Approximately 1 in 10 individuals over the age of 12 abuses substances on a regular basis (NSDUH, 2016). Further, in 2018, an estimated 128 people died each day in the United States due to opioid overdose (NIH, 2018). Due to high rates of drug use, police are frequently sent to crime scenes in which illegal drugs are present. As a result of inconsistent reporting from government agencies, it is not possible to obtain an exact estimate of how many calls and arrests in the United States are drug related. However, the Vera Institute of Justice developed an interactive tool that combines information from a variety of platforms to get as comprehensive a view as possible. This platform indicated that, in 2016, around 15% of arrests in the United States were drug related, highlighting the importance of better understanding the happenings at drug-related crime scenes (Vera Institute of Justice, n.d.).

There is a lack of clarity concerning how many drug-related crime scenes have children present and what the outcomes of these calls are, as these events do not seem to be well reported; however, there is evidence that this is a topic in need of further investigation. In 2008, the Bureau of Justice...
Statistics released a special report that indicated that the number of children of incarcerated parents had increased by 80% in state and federal prisons (to 1,706,600 children) between 1991 and 2007. In 2007, nearly half of the inmates in state and federal prisons were parents of children under 18. Of state prison inmates who met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse in 2004, an estimated 68.9% (177,900) male and 74.3% (20,900) female inmates reported living with their children in the month before arrest or just prior to incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). By 2016, an estimated 8.7 million children in the United States were living with a parent who was abusing substances (NSDUH, 2016).

In 2002, the California Research Bureau reported that nearly two-thirds of local law enforcement agencies in the state had no clear policy on how officers should handle children, whether they are merely present or perceived by police as involved in the case that their caregivers were arrested (Nieto, 2002). This was supported by a 2014 analysis conducted by the ACLU highlighting the increased militarization of police. They recognized that many incident report forms used by SWAT teams in the United States did not have a mechanism to identify the presence of children. However, ACLU used inferences based on what was written in the reports to make estimates and, based on the 818 SWAT deployments they investigated, at least 14% definitively had children present (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014). Further, in a 2014 report, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Bureau of Justice Assistance acknowledged bookkeeping issues related to children witnessing the arrest of caregivers, as well as a lack of clear direction for ensuring the well-being of affected children (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2014).

Advocates for drug endangered children at the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children recently released a second edition guide for law enforcement who recognize children present at drug-related crime scenes (National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children, 2020). Further, tracking systems for drug endangered children have recently been established in some states, and guidelines for implementing statewide tracking systems have been published to encourage other states to keep an eye on these children (Mulligan et al., 2016). Given the high number of incarcerated parents who are struggling with addiction and the attention being brought to lack of proper reporting when children are present at crime scenes, it is apparent that the presence of children at drug-related crime scenes is an area worthy of investigation.

Although a variety of publications have examined and documented significant mental health challenges that emerge as the result of children being exposed to the arrest of a family member (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Phillips & Zhao, 2010; Roberts et al., 2014), researchers have not yet investigated the ways in which police perceive and respond to children being present at drug-related crime scenes. Police may be impacted by children present at drug-related crime scenes in a number of ways, all of which could potentially influence outcomes for the children. These scenarios may contribute to increased stress levels in police officers. Police work has been shown to be both physically and emotionally stressful (Anderson et al., 2002; Bakker & Heuven, 2008; Shane, 2010; Violanti et al., 2017). Job-related stressors have been linked to a variety of emotional health challenges in police officers, including depressive symptoms (Allison et al., 2019; National Institute of Justice, 2012), emotional dissonance and burnout (Bakker & Heuven, 2008), suicidal ideation (Chae & Boyle, 2012), and domestic violence (Anderson & Lo, 2011).

In addition to the potential for increased stress, police behavior at these crime scenes could be influenced by their own assumptions about drugs, people who use drugs, and their children. Although the study of police perceptions of drug-related crime is surprisingly limited, officers have been shown to support the implementation and enforcement of stringent laws aimed at controlling the use, manufacture, and sale of all drugs (Jorgensen, 2018; Petrocelli et al., 2014). Research has shown that children tend to have more critical views of police than adults do (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Jesilow et al., 1995). Further, it has been shown that children tend to base their views of police off of their parents’ views (Sindall et al., 2017). It is possible that police behavior toward both adults and children at a crime scene could be influenced by the belief that the children hold a negative view of law enforcement officers.

Given the increased emergence of evidence that supports the disease model of addiction (Volkow et al., 2016) and increased violence by police toward persons who inject drugs (Kutsa et al., 2016), it is important to consider literature that highlights evidence of police assigning blame to and stigmatizing victims of crime (Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; Greeson et al., 2016). It has been found that police anticipate that victims of...
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certain crimes will behave in particular ways, which can increase disbelief of victims and victim blaming (Ask, 2010). Further, it appears that stigmatization of victims by police can hurt the individuals who need help and support. For example, a 2015 study revealed that domestic violence survivors report feeling stigmatized by a variety of different professional helpers including police (Crowe & Murray, 2015). Similarly, complainants who were intoxicated during alleged sexual assaults were deemed to be less credible and were viewed more negatively by police (Schuller & Stewart, 2000). It is plausible that police might even hold negative views towards the children who are at drug-related crime scenes.

Until recently, there was a major gap in research conducted to better understand stigma among law enforcement officers who interact with individuals who are addicted to drugs. However, a recent publication revealed that officers who work on the front lines of the opioid crisis have high levels of stigma toward individuals with opioid addiction, specifically in the areas of assigning blame, perceived dangerousness, and preferred social distance (Kruis et al., 2020). These findings, coupled with the understanding that peoples’ behavior in social situations can be shaped by implicit beliefs (for a review, see Ferguson & Bargh, 2004) highlight the importance of investigating the ways in which professional helpers interact with individuals at drug-related crime scenes. Police officers are especially important to investigate, as they fill powerful roles that can influence the lives of adults and children in need of support.

The current study utilized a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) and semistructured interview (see Appendix B) to investigate beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of police officers concerning children present at drug-related crime scenes. Rather than forming hypotheses, the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method utilizes an inductive approach that involves forming conclusions based on the collection and analysis of data (Hill, 2012). This allows for results to emerge out of data rather than imposing theoretical constructs on the data, thus aiding in the discovery of hypotheses (Hill, 2012).

The following research questions were proposed in place of formal hypotheses: (a) How do these police officers’ perceptions differ when arriving at a drug-related crime scene versus arriving at a drug-related crime scene with children present? (b) How are police officers impacted by the potential belief that children may hold negative views of officers? (c) Does having children of their own impact police officers’ views regarding the presence of children at drug-related crime scenes? If so, in what way? (d) How does witnessing children at drug-related crime scenes impact the participants emotionally?

Method

Recruitment and Participants

This study was approved by the University of Indianapolis Human Research Protections Program institutional review board. No members of the research team were directly connected with law enforcement. Consistent with qualitative research, convenience and snowball sampling were utilized to recruit participants (Hill, 2012). Participants were recruited via flyers, in-person recruiting, and snowball sampling. For in-person recruiting, the primary researcher spoke to a state police administrator who set up a time for her to present the research topic to officers present in the office who were open to participation. Additionally, the primary researcher spoke to individuals who had connections with police, who then encouraged the officers they knew to participate and to hang flyers in their precincts. None of the participants were recruited by flyers, seven were recruited in person by the primary researcher, and five were brought in through word of mouth. Recruited participants were employed at police stations in Monticello, Lafayette, Seymour, and Brookston, Indiana.

Twelve police officers were recruited, which is compatible with the CQR method (Hill, 2012). All participants were White men employed as police officers in suburban, urban, and rural areas within the state of Indiana. The study excluded participants who were not fluent in English, as the demographic questionnaire and semistructured interview were conducted in English. Participants had been working as police officers for between 2 and 34 years ($M = 16.88$; $SD = 10.36$). Participants ranged in age from 30 to 61 ($M = 44.58$ years; $SD = 11.09$). Eleven officers attended at least some college, and one officer had a high school diploma/GED. All but one participant had children. All participants had previously witnessed children present at a drug-related crime scene; however, officers responded with different types of measurements (i.e., fewer than 20, more than 100, between 10 and 15). See Table 1 for specific details.

Procedures

All interviews took place in person in a private office or study room at a library or police station. Verbal
consent was obtained following explanation of the purpose of the study, procedures, possible benefits, possible risks and discomforts, confidentiality of records, audio recording details, potential costs, payment for participation ($15 gift card), and voluntary participation with right of refusal. To ensure confidentiality, names were de-identified with assigned number codes, and a key containing the number code and corresponding personal information was kept on a separate, encrypted document to be utilized in case a participant were to withdraw from the study. After completion, participants were given monetary incentive, debriefed, and given a list of referrals to local mental health service providers.

Measures
Demographic Questionnaire
The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) asked participants to identify their age, number of years employed as a police officer, current city/state of employment, race/ethnicity, education level, and if they have children. Additionally, participants were asked how many times they had witnessed children present at a drug-related crime scene.

Semistructured Interview
Given this is the first known study related to this topic, the semistructured interview questions (see Appendix B) were designed specifically to address the current research questions. The interview contained 20 questions broken up into four sections: (a) perceptions about drug-related crime scenes with vs. without children present, (b) impact of children’s negative perceptions of police, (c) impact of having children of their own, and (d) effect of children being present at a drug-related crime scene on participant. The semistructured interviews lasted between 10 and 55 minutes (M = 22.18; SD = 11.75).

Consensual Qualitative Research
Analysis Team
Data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the CQR method (Hill, 2012). The primary research team consisted of 13 members who discussed, debated, and arrived at a consensus about the meaning and placement of data. The analysis team consisted of 12 women and one man, eight undergraduates and five graduate students. The team consisted of 10 European American members, one Asian member, and two biracial members. All members of the analysis team received didactic training on the CQR method in the form of a presentation and discussion prior to the start of data analysis (Hill, 2012, p. 52–53). Members of the team discussed any biases and/or preconceived notions that had the potential to influence their analysis of the data.

Auditors
Two auditors were included to act as a double-check for the team throughout the analysis. One auditor was a European American, male, undergraduate student and the other was a Hispanic, male, graduate student. Consistent with CQR, auditors were in a separate room and their role was to check the work of the primary analysis team and provide feedback and recommendations for each stage of data analysis (domains, core ideas, cross analysis). Having the auditors to provide feedback improves the validity of the primary analysis teams’ conclusions and helps counteract groupthink (Hill, 2012).

Identifying Domains
The first step in CQR data analysis is identifying domains, which are “broad categories or topics that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years employed as a police officer</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Highest level of education/degree</th>
<th>Children of their own</th>
<th>How many times they have witnessed children at drug-related crime scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>≤20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>31</td>
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<td>10–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>≥50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11½</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s</td>
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<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s</td>
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<td>100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are used to cluster data” (Hill, 2012). The initial domain list was created individually, then members of the team met as a group to come to a consensus on a clear, agreed upon domain list that applied to all transcripts. After the initial domain list was created, it was sent to the auditors to review and was subsequently returned with feedback and suggestions. The primary team could choose to either accept or reject the auditors’ feedback. All transcripts were reviewed, all raw data were assigned to domains, and then it was sent to the auditors for review.

**Core Ideas and Cross Analysis**

Core ideas are summaries of the data within domains. In this step, the interview data for each case within each domain were edited to yield concise and clear wording of the statement (or core ideas). This was then sent to the auditors for review. Cross analysis is the final and most critical step of CQR. It consists of identifying common themes across cases (Hill, 2012). During cross analysis, all of the core ideas were examined, and overarching categories were generated to describe the core ideas. Subcategories were also generated to describe the data more adequately. Each domain, category, and subcategory were then organized in order to assess for the frequency of categories across all participants (Hill, 2012).

**Results**

**Domains**

After completing the semistructured interviews, a total of nine domains were identified: (a) Emotional Responses Toward the Presence of Children, (b) Job Role Impact with the Presence of Children, (c) Ways Police Officers Desire to Help Children at Drug-Related Crime Scenes, (d) Impact of Child Characteristics, (e) Interactions with Children, (f) Messages Children get Regarding Police Officers, (g) Impact of Being a Parent, (h) Coping Mechanisms, and (i) Perceptions of Addiction. These domains were further divided into categories and subcategories during cross-analysis. Depending on the number of participants who addressed a category in their interview, categories were identified as either general (11–12 participants), typical (6–10 participants), or variant (2–5 participants). See Table 2 for a summary of results.

As indicated by CQR methodology, less pertinent results (variant categories and subcategories) will not be discussed in detail (Hill, 2012). To simplify presentation of the identified domains, they will be discussed within the research questions that they help to answer. To demonstrate how categories and subcategories applied to the participants, verbatim quotes from the interviews are used when needed for further clarification.

**Research Question #1**

The first research question asked how do these police officers’ perceptions differ when arriving at a drug-related crime scene versus arriving at a drug-related crime scene with children present.

**Emotional Responses Toward the Presence of Children.** This domain examines emotions police officers experience when they witness children at drug-related crime scenes. As a typical response, eight participants expressed feeling anger toward the parent/caregiver when they see children at drug-related crime scenes. Several variant categories emerged revealing additional emotions that police officers experience in these situations. These include disappointment, sadness, it “being hard,” “feeling sorry,” and some expressed experiencing emotion in general, without stating specific emotions.

**Job Role Impact With the Presence of Children.** This domain describes the ways in which a police officer’s job is impacted when children are present at drug-related crime scenes. As a typical response, eight police officers discussed aspects of their job in general, regardless of the presence of children.

Finding placement or determining who will care for the child as a result of the caregiver(s) being arrested emerged as another typical response. Specifically, 10 participants discussed their job being impacted because they need to find placement for the children. For example, one participant stated, “Just making sure that they get to the next step and they get placed in a home where they’re going to be safe.” Within the category of finding placement for children, a typical subcategory emerged. Nine participants discussed the involvement of The Department of Child Services/Child Protective Services (DCS/CPS) in the placement of children.

As another typical response, seven participants indicated that communication is impacted when children are present at drug-related crime scenes. Within this category, a typical subcategory of communication with the children emerged. Seven participants focused their communication efforts on the children rather than on the parents/caregivers. For example, one participant stated, “Try to talk to them, let them know that I’m there for their safety. You know just try to take care of them the best we can until DCS gets there and then they do what they do.”
Research Question #2
The second question asked how police officers are impacted by the potential belief that children may hold negative views of police officers. It is important to note that this section is focused on what messages the police officers believe children have received and not the actual perceptions of the children themselves.

Messages Children Get Regarding Police Officers. One general category emerged with 11 participants having the belief that children often receive the message that police officers are bad. One participant stated, “They have an image in their mind of the same as their parents that we’re bad. It’s really frustrating.” From this, two variant categories emerged: scared and good. Three participants believed children fear police officers due to messages they receive regarding police. Four participants also mentioned that some children may be given the message that police officers are good; however, they indicated that this is rare when dealing with children at drug-related crime scenes.

Interactions With Children. A typical category emerged in which eight participants reported believing that children might have received negative messages about police. For example, one police

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency Analysis of Domain, Categories, and Subcategories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain, Category, and Subcategory</th>
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<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Emotions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Role Impact With the Presence of Children</td>
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<td>Job</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Child</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job to Do</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCS</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed From Crime Scene</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>With Children</td>
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<td>Desired Ways to Help Children at Drug-Related Crime Scenes</td>
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<td>Better Life</td>
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<td>Placement</td>
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<td>Out of Situation</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>Older Children</td>
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<td>Impact of Child Characteristics Cont.</td>
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<td>Disappointment Cont.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
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<td>General Emotions Cont.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Sadness Cont.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard Cont.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Sorry Cont.</td>
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<td>Anger Cont.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
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<td>Job Role Impact With the Presence of Children Cont.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Cont.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on Child Cont.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job to Do Cont.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Safety Cont.</td>
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<td>Resources Cont.</td>
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<td>Placement Cont.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Communication Cont.</td>
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<td>Helping Cont.</td>
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<td>Scared</td>
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<td>Good</td>
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<td>Impact of Being a Parent</td>
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<td>Own Children</td>
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<td>Difficulty</td>
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<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Typical</td>
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<td>Coping Mechanisms Cont.</td>
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<td>Blocking Out Emotions Cont.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Coping Mechanisms</td>
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<td>Not Bringing Work Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Talking About Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spending Time With Family</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hobbies</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
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<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Controlling Emotions</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing All They Can Do</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Struggling to Separate Work From Home</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Talking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talking to Family</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to Wife/Spouse</td>
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<td>Impact on Family</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Not Struggling With Emotions</td>
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<td>Anger</td>
<td>Variant</td>
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<td>Perceptions of Addiction</td>
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</table>
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An officer discussed wanting to change children’s perceptions. Another participant described not wanting to leave the children with a bad perception of police officers, stating “If you can get them away and interact with them and leave a good positive mental note on them that, ‘Hey, police officers really aren’t that bad.’ That’s what I try to do.”

Research Question #3
The third question asked if having children of their own impacts police officers’ views regarding the presence of children at drug-related crime scenes. If so, in what way?

Impact of Being a Parent. This domain examines the ways police officers believe being a parent impacts witnessing children at drug-related crime scenes. A typical category emerged with six participants discussing their own children. For example, one participant stated, “I thank God that I, my children are, didn’t take that route. I mean, they’re all good kids.” Another typical category expressed by six participants dealt with their emotions. For example, one participant discussed his worry regarding his own children. He stated:

I really don’t think I have to worry about it with my kids, but there is that outside chance that they could get in the wrong crowd and get introduced to drugs, so I kind of worry about that.

Research Question #4
The fourth question asked how witnessing children at drug-related crime scenes impacts the participants.

Coping Mechanisms. This domain examines coping mechanisms police officers use to deal with stress and the difficult situations they regularly face. Participants discussed both struggles and successes of their coping mechanisms. As a typical response, eight police officers described one of their coping mechanisms to be not showing emotions. For example, one participant felt police officers cannot have emotions. He stated, “You can’t have emotions. It’s no different than if, you know, when we roll up on a fatal crash scene. You can’t have emotions.” A variant subcategory of blocking out emotions emerged, as four participants stated they would block out emotions to prevent showing emotion.

A second typical category to emerge was that seven participants believed they do not struggle with emotions. For example, one participant stated, “So it’s tough, but most of the time I can control it, I think, not that difficult, unless like I say, they’re cussing you or ordering you out of their house or something. That’s different.” A variant subcategory emerged with four participants stating they do not struggle with their emotions because they control their emotions.

A third typical category emerged in which six participants discussed avoiding bringing work home as a coping mechanism. For example, one participant stated, “Just call, just do the best you can to just call someone else if something’s bothering you. Call another officer, or call a friend that you trust and just don’t bring it home.” A typical subcategory emerged in which six participants mentioned not talking about work. For example, one participant stated:

I don’t talk a lot about what’s going on at home or I don’t talk a lot at home about what’s going on at work, which could be bad, I don’t know. It’s kind of weird because I’ll get into a stressful situation at work but then when I get home I’m like, I just like turn a switch and uh you know.

A fourth typical category emerged for ways in which participants cope with stress. Participating in hobbies was mentioned by six police officers as a way to deal with the stress of the job. For example, when asked how he has attempted to separate work from home, one participant stated, “10,000 hobbies probably.” Two variant subcategories emerged under hobbies and include participants utilizing exercise and sleep as coping mechanisms.

Six participants mentioned struggling to separate work from home, revealing a fifth typical category. For example, one participant talked about not being able to separate work from home because he is always on call. He stated, “It’s real hard to separate it because, you know we’ve got, uh, I mean we’re on call all the time, so I carry my cell phone, everywhere I go.”

The last typical category endorsed by seven participants as a coping mechanism was talking. A typical subcategory emerged under talking, as seven police officers reported talking to their family to cope with emotional struggles. For example, one participant stated, “I’ll talk to my parents a lot about those things as well because they know me best too. I try to talk to people who are extremely close to me.” A variant subcategory emerged under talking, with three participants stating that they talk to their spouses as a coping mechanism.
Several variant categories were expressed as coping mechanisms utilized by officers. Police officers also discussed the struggles and successes of being able to cope. These include spending time with family, religion, difficulty controlling emotions, doing all they can do, detachment, impact on family, being successful in separating work from home, thoughts, emotions impacting job, and anger.

**Additional Domains Worth Noting**
Lastly, there are domains that provided valuable information that did not fit directly with any of the research questions.

**Impact of Child Characteristics.** This domain describes the ways in which police officers believe characteristics of the children impact their opinions and feelings when they witness children present at drug-related crime scenes. As a general response, all participants discussed age in relation to their views about the child/children at drug-related crime scenes. A general subcategory of younger children emerged. Eleven participants discussed how these types of situations are harder when children are especially young. For example, one participant stated, “Well the younger they are, the worse it is... when I see a baby, to me, it’s 10 times as bad.” Additionally, a typical subcategory of older children emerged, in which seven participants mentioned older children impacting their views. For example, one participant stated:

> Not really sure on that. Even if they’re really young children, they’re more of a victim, but when they become teenagers, it makes you wonder are they involved and then at that point are the parents using them or because they’re living in this environment are they picking up on mom and dad don’t do anything, don’t go to work, they sell drugs, they make money.

All participants brought up the gender of the children as a feature that could potentially impact an officer’s response when witnessing children present at drug-related crime scenes, revealing another general category. For example, one participant stated, “unfortunately anymore, gender has no effect on me. I’ve seen a side effect of methamphetamines is a highly sexual aroused group of uses and it used to be that when you see young girls you gotta worry, you know, have they been molested? Have they been touched, and now it transcends into boys too.” However, a general subcategory emerged with 11 participants stating that the gender of a child does not make a difference in how they themselves view or treat children at drug-related crime scenes.

**Interactions With Children.** This domain looks at the ways in which police officers interact with children at drug-related crime scenes. As a typical response, nine participants endorsed trying to communicate well with the children. For example, one participant stated, “We kind of have to reach out to them and kind of just talk to them.”

A second typical category, reported by nine participants, dealt with general interactions. One participant discussed that the actions police officers take may impact the children. Another participant mentioned his desire to have a good interaction with the children:

> Actions that we take speak volumes. So, how we treat people, how we interact with them, you know, our mindset, mentality when we walk in the door, and you know if somebody has a chip on their shoulder as soon as they walk in the door, the kids are very—they’ll pick up on that very quick, but you know how we interact with people is huge.

A typical subcategory of attempts emerged with six participants discussing things they attempt to do with or for the children. For example, one participant stated, “You try to comfort the kids as much as you possibly can.” Another participant discussed wanting to do more for the children who appear to think he is bad.

**Perceptions of People Struggling With Addiction.** This domain recounts the perceptions police officers have of individuals struggling with addiction. As a typical response, six police officers discussed addiction being a cycle. For example, one participant stated:

> I feel like most of those kids when they grow up—they will also inherit the same bad habits I guess or addictions because they’re kind of raised in that environment and they just keep repeating the cycle.

**Discussion**
The findings of this study were extracted from detailed analyses of police officers’ beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of the presence of children at drug-related crime scenes. The first goal was to investigate how police officers’ perceptions
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differ when they arrive at drug-related crime scenes with or without children present. Research from Oxburgh and colleagues (2015) looked at police perceptions regarding sexual offence and murder cases involving adult and children victims. Of their participants, 98% indicated that “any case involving children had the most impact on officers at all levels, especially if officers had children of their own” (Oxburgh et al., 2015, p. 46). Consistent with this and interviews of police officers reported by Nachtwey in Time Magazine (2018), participants in the current study reported having different emotional responses depending on whether children were present. When children are present, eight participants expressed feeling anger toward the parent/caregiver. Additionally, six participants reported having a strong desire to help children.

Some studies in the victim-blame literature have found that older children victims of sexual assault are perceived as less credible compared to children who are younger than 5 years old (Davies & Rogers, 2006); however, not all studies find this main effect of age (Stromwell et al., 2013). In the current study, all participants reported that the age of the child present at a drug-related crime scene impacts how they perceive the situation. Eleven participants discussed the presence of younger children being more challenging. Three participants mentioned that, when they are dealing with older children, they are concerned about their potential involvement with the drugs. Based on these findings, it is likely that, at an undefined age or developmental milestone, some police officers’ perceptions of children shift from seeing the child as a victim to seeing them as a potential suspect, which would have an impact on how they interact with the child. It has been found in child sexual abuse literature that individuals are more likely to victim blame older children (Back & Lips, 1998). It is possible that officers begin to assign blame to older children or teenagers, highlighting a need for research aimed at better understanding how to protect older children in these settings.

Previous research has demonstrated that the primary job of a police officer changes when children are present at crime scenes (Manning, 1999; Zezima, 2017). According to Manning (1999), the likelihood of children being left behind after caregivers are arrested for using or manufacturing methamphetamine is ever increasing, thus leaving officers to care for, comfort, and entertain the children. When children are involved, officers shift their focus to getting the children to a safe environment, which impacts their ability to focus on their primary missions (Manning, 1999). Consistent with previous findings, the current study found that police officers believe that their job duties are impacted and altered when children are present at drug-related crime scenes. Eight police officers endorsed that, regardless of children being present, they “have a job to do” and their focus needs to be on their job; however, when children are present, they describe shifting their focus to the safety and placement of the children. Understanding how police officers’ jobs are impacted by children present at drug-related crime scenes can increase understanding of how to better help both police and children in these situations.

The second goal of the study was to better understand how the perception of children’s negative views of police officers impact participants. Eleven participants felt that children are receiving negative messages that police officers are bad. Furthermore, eight participants believed that the child’s perception of them impacted their interaction with the child. Nine participants reported that they shift their focus and direct more attention to children at drug-related crime scenes because they believe these children think they are bad. Although this was a common theme among the police officers interviewed for this study, it is possible that this could also have the opposite effect on some officers, leading to increased apathy and decreased effort to comfort or help children. It may help to educate officers on research that has shown the flexibility of youths’ perceptions and the ability to improve their perceptions in collaborative settings (Fine et al., 2019). If the belief that many children view police officers as bad is carried into settings beyond drug-related crime scenes, this could change the way police officers regularly interact with children. This finding also highlights that perception, and awareness training could be helpful for police because it is quite possible that police are influenced by these assumptions whether or not a child actually holds those beliefs.

The third goal of the study was to explore whether having children of their own impacts police officer’s views. Six participants discussed how their job has impacted their views of their own children, with two stating they worry more about their children due to their job. One discussed how thankful he is that his children are not using drugs; whereas, two participants discussed knowing and understanding how easy it would be for their
children to become addicted to drugs. Six participants discussed how being a parent has impacted their emotions, with some discussing emotions in terms of seeing children on the job and others discussing emotions in terms of their own children.

The final goal of the study was to gain an understanding of how witnessing children at drug-related crime scenes impacts officers. Rather than discussing the impact, all participants discussed their coping mechanisms and how they deal with the impact. Specifically, six participants discussed utilizing hobbies and seven mentioned talking to people/family as ways of coping. Despite utilizing numerous coping mechanisms, six participants struggle to separate work from home. Although seven participants stated they do not struggle with emotions, all of them still discussed emotional struggles. Many participants felt they dealt with witnessing children at drug-related crime scenes by not showing emotions (eight participants), not allowing the work to mentally come home with them (six participants), and not talking about it once they get home (six participants). Understanding police officers’ emotional struggles and coping mechanisms can reveal ways to help them better identify their own emotional challenges in addition to providing them with mental health resources, as counseling has been shown to benefit officers in the past (Carlan & Nored, 2008). The current findings revealed that 9 of 12 officers discussed not having a proper outlet for their emotional struggles. Because this is a small sample size, it is difficult to say whether this observation would be seen consistently.

Given this was not an intended research topic, this study had an unexpected finding in that eight participants discussed their perceptions of addiction and individuals struggling with addiction. Consistent with research by Beletsky et al. (2005), six participants felt addiction is a cycle and described its cyclic nature. This was discussed when participants mentioned the struggle of finding placement for the children because many family members are also using drugs, which is consistent with a 2017 investigative journalism piece that described the difficulties of finding proper placement for the children (Zezima, 2017).

**Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

This is the first study to look at police officers’ views of children being present at drug-related crime scenes. It is the first study to ask police officers to be introspective about their roles and responsibilities to children at drug-related crime scenes. The officers discussed how they cope and compartmentalize in order to separate home from work. They discussed their own defense mechanisms and how they use those mechanisms, especially when they have children. It was revealing to hear the police officers become vulnerable and discuss how difficult it is to hear the negative messages that young children often receive about police officers. The officers also shared with the researcher that part of their unofficial job description is to find appropriate resources for these children.

The current study was designed as an exploratory analysis, and future research should explore some of the themes that emerged in addition to evaluating the validity and generalizability of these themes with a larger sample. Additionally, there are a number of limitations to the current study that should be considered in future research. One such limitation is a general lack of diversity in (a) gender of participants, (b) race of participants, (c) whether participants had children, and (d) location of participants. Future research should either include female police officers or replicate the study with only female officers. Future studies could also attempt to recruit police officers of color in addition to recruiting more police officers who do not have children to be able to better understand and generalize these findings. All participants were recruited within the state of Indiana. Future research should consider gathering data from police officers all over the United States to further validate the results to a broader spectrum of police officers. This study looked at general police officers rather than specialized narcotics police officers; determining differences between these two types of officers may shed additional light on the current findings.

We specifically asked police officers about children’s negative views of police, thus potentially introducing unintentional bias to what is likely a complex concept in need of further investigation. The perceptions children have of police officers may be influenced by socioeconomic status (SES), as previous literature has observed interactions between race, SES, and trust in police (Panditharatne et al., 2018). However, the current study did not take SES of children into account. None of the police officers discussed any type of training regarding children at crime scenes, and specific protocols were not examined. Future research should assess how prepared police officers feel in addition to collecting information about the training they have and the training they would like to have.
Future research should consider looking at differences related to the level of trauma a child may be experiencing at drug-related crime scenes, for example differences when the parent/caregiver is alive versus deceased. Another direction for future research may be the type of drug found at the crime scene. Officers may have different perceptions of children at drug scenes involving opiates (e.g., potentially due to the high risk of death related to fentanyl and related drugs), methamphetamine (e.g., potentially due to the high risk of toxic exposure), or alcohol (e.g., with officers’ perceptions of this legally acquired intoxicant that can be associated with crime or removal of children from a home). Based on the findings related to officers mentioning the age of the children present at crime scenes, it is possible that the police officers begin to assign blame to older children or teenagers rather than seeing them as victims. This is an area that should be examined, as interactions between police and children of any age present at drug-related crime scenes could be hugely impactful to the child’s development.

Conclusion
This study provides a first look into police officers’ beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions regarding the presence of children at drug-related crime scenes. Given the nature of CQR research and the small sample, big scale recommendations cannot be made (Hill, 2012). Yet, it is important to have information regarding police officers’ views, as they are the ones on the front lines seeing the consequences of drug abuse (Police Executive Research Forum, 2014). Previous research has demonstrated the impact police officers’ attitudes have on their actions (Barrett et al., 2009; Johnson, 2011; Marinos & Innocente, 2008; Oberweis & Musheno, 2001). Understanding police officers’ views about people struggling with addiction, the children involved, and the parents/caregivers involved can help reveal how this may impact their actions at drug-related crime scenes when children are present. Findings from this study suggest it is likely that, at some undefined age, some officers shift their perception of the children from victim to potential suspect, which would have an impact on their interactions with the child. It is possible that the officers begin to assign blame to older children or teenagers. Also, participants in this study believe children are receiving the message that police officers are bad, which likely impacts their interactions with the children. Being aware of police officers’ struggles with coping and managing emotions in addition to how their jobs are impacted by the presence of children at crime scenes can provide further insight on mental health resources needed for police. Police in this study specified that finding placement for children in these situations impacted their job, which suggests that resources are needed to help find placement for children at drug-related crime scenes. This study was meant to be an exploratory analysis of police officers’ beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of the presence of children at drug-related crime scenes; therefore, more research is needed to accurately provide larger scale recommendations.

References
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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age: ____

2. Number of years employed as a police officer: ________________

3. Please name the city/state that you are employed in: ________________

4. Please specify your racial/ethnic background:
   - African American/Black
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - European American/White
   - Hispanic/Non-White
   - Mixed Race (please specify): _______________________________
   - Other (please specify): ________________________________

5. Please specify your highest level of education completed:
   - High School Diploma/GED
   - Some College
   - Associate's Degree
   - Bachelor's Degree
   - Graduate Degree
   - Other (please specify): ________________________________

6. Do you have children?
   - Yes
   - No

7. Please specify if you have ever witnessed children present at a drug-related crime scene:
   - Yes
   - No
   - Other (please specify)

8. If yes, approximately how many times? ________

Appendix B

Semistructured Interview Questions

Perceptions About Drug-Related Crime Scenes With Vs. Without Children Present

- What is your initial reaction when you see children at a drug-related crime scene?
- When you arrive at a drug-related crime scene and see children present, how does this change your feelings compared to arriving at a drug-related crime scene without children present?
- Do you have a strong desire to help the children in a particular way? In what way?
- In what ways have you responded to the well-being of children present at drug-related crime scenes?
- In what ways does the age of a child/children affect how you perceive drug-related crime scenes with children present?
- In what ways does the gender of a child/children affect how you perceive drug-related crime scenes with children present?

Impact of Children's Negative Perceptions of Police

- At times, these children might have been told that police officers are "bad." How do you know if they see you as a bad person? Good person?
- How does this affect your interaction with the child?
- How do you gain the child's trust or help them to understand that you are there to help them?

Impact of Having Children of Their Own

- Do you have any children?
- If so: How do you believe this has impacted your feelings when you see children at drug-related crime scenes?
- If not: How do you believe that if you had children it would change your feelings when you see children at drug-related crime scenes? In what ways?

Effect of Children Being Present at a Drug-Related Crime Scene on Participant

- How do you control your emotions when you arrive at a drug-related crime scene where children are present?
- How do you control your emotions when you see a child under the influence of a drug because of caregiver exposure?
- In what ways are you able to compartmentalize situations regarding drug use and children being present?
- How have you attempted to separate work from home?
- In what ways have you struggled with separating work from home?
- In what ways have you succeeded in separating work from home?
- Would you say you experience emotional struggles outside of the crime scene after witnessing children present at a drug-related crime scene? Can you explain?
- How do you cope with these emotional struggles?
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