

“I can’t unsee the things that I’ve seen”: Police Prosecutors’ Experiences of Engaging with Potentially Traumatic Materials

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Background

- Exposure to potentially traumatic materials (PTM) has **similar adverse impacts** on frontline and back-office staff in the criminal justice system (CJS) ^{1, 2, 3, 4}
- Police prosecutors are NZ criminal legal professionals who can be **constabulary** police officers or **non-constabulary** qualified lawyers ⁵

Objective

Describe the process of engaging with PTM for Police Prosecutors including:

- Ways they are **exposed** to PTM
- **Impact** of PTM on them
- Factors that **exacerbate or alleviate** these effects
- **Barriers** to seeking help

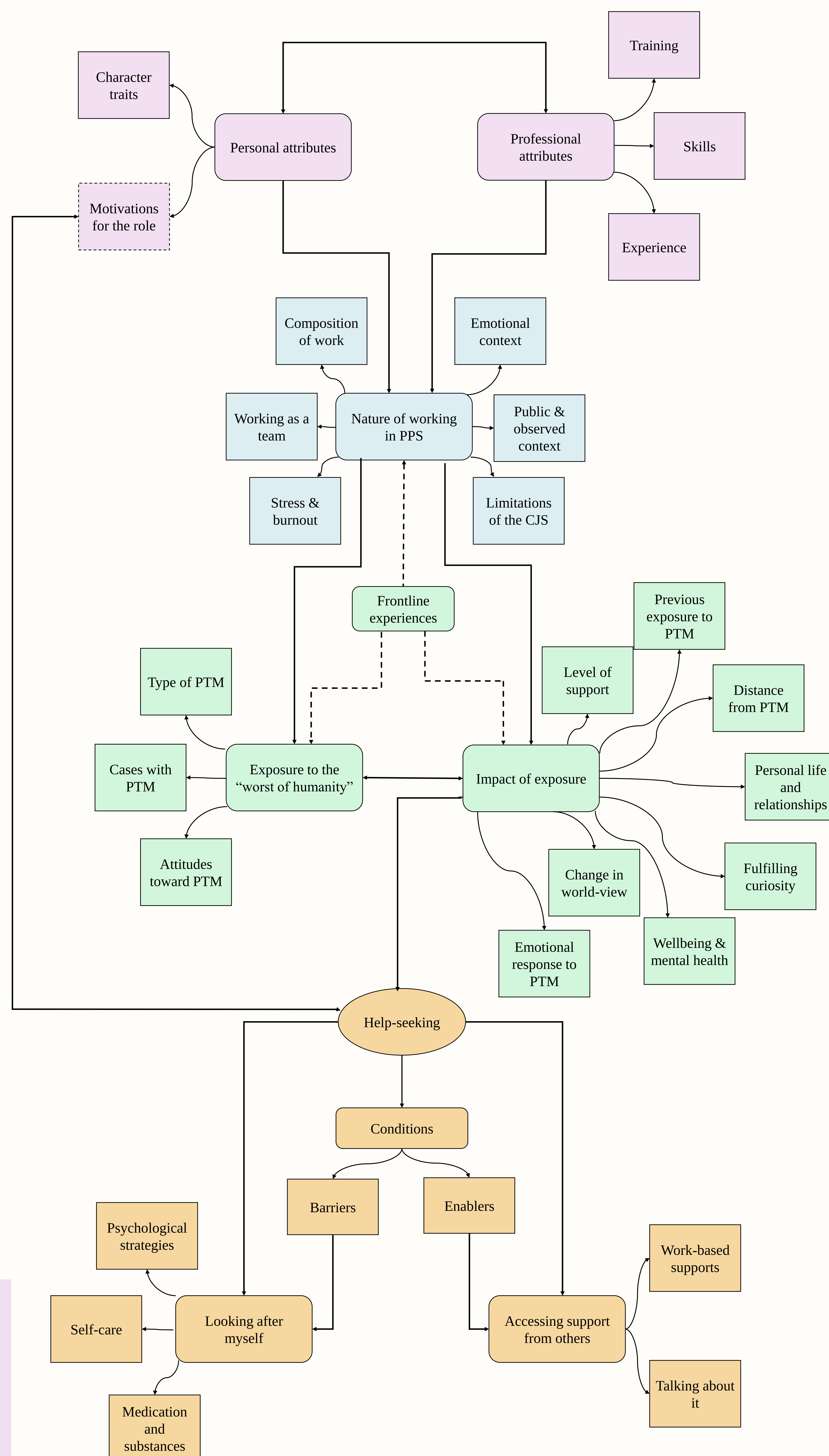
Method

- Interviews with 15 police prosecutors
 - 8 Male | 7 Female
 - 8 Constabulary | 7 Non-Constabulary
 - 11 Pākehā | 3 Māori + Pākehā | 1 Other
- Data were analysed using Grounded Theory⁶
- A descriptive model was developed comprising four phases

Results

Phase One: Preparation for the role

- **Personal attributes, training and experience** provided necessary interpersonal and technical **skills** for the role
- Despite generally feeling well prepared, some expressed feeling “thrown in at the deep end”



Phase Two: Challenges of the working environment

- Varied **workload** and **team** environment were enjoyable
- Navigating **emotional expectations**, professional and public **criticism** and the **limitations of the CJS** was difficult
- Cumulation of challenges could lead to feelings of **stress and burnout**

Phase Three: Nature and Impacts of PTM Exposure

- PTM and CJS often viewed differently by constabulary participants
- Visual PTM and some cases, including family violence and those with vulnerable victims, were **more impactful**
- Some saw **benefits** of PTM exposure, others experienced **negative impacts** on wellbeing and worldview
- **Distance from PTM, feeling prepared** for exposure and being **supported** in role alleviated impacts

Phase Four: Strategies for Maintaining Wellbeing

- Preferred **independent** coping mechanisms
- Only sought support from others if **enablers** met
- If **barriers** encountered, reverted to independent coping

Conclusions

- Important that police prosecutors are well prepared for the challenges of the role
- Diverse backgrounds influence impacts of PTM exposure
- Barriers to help-seeking need to be reduced
- Further research expanding on the current study would be beneficial

References

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