

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to Stevens, Webster and Stipak (1980), the term 'response time' is defined as the duration between when a call is received by the call handler, to the arrival of a Police Officer at the scene. A call into the emergency services is often referred to as a Call for Service (CFS). The response times are measured differently dependent on the priority of the CFS, as well as various organisations tend to grade them in different ways. However, the concept is the same for all forces (Verlaan and Ruiter, 2023).

The research will focus on the importance of meeting the Target Response Time (TRT) for Grade 1 (G1) and Grade 2 (G2) calls as these suggest there is a significant risk to life, likelihood of serious injury, a concern for someone's safety and/or a risk of evidence loss (Gwent Police, 2022). The researcher aims to identify what factors are affecting the TRT and to provide recommendations to help improve them. In addition, the researcher will look to discuss a recent speed limit law that was introduced in Wales and highlight any gaps in the research.

The Importance of Police Target Response Times

Response times are an extremely important factor for police investigations and the statistics are often used as performance measures (Vidal and Kirchmaier, 2018). Gwent Police grade the CFS based on the level of threat, risk and harm and these are then categorised into sub-gradings in accordance with National Contact Management Principles and Guidance (Association of Chief Police Officers, 2012). The gradings highlight the likelihood of a danger to life, serious injury, a concern for safety or the risk of loss of evidence. Lee, Lee and Hoover (2016) states the police use response times as a measurement of their effectiveness. This is supported by Salimbene and Zhang (2020), who also goes on to suggest response times can help deter, prevent and decrease crime. Vidal and Kirchmaier (2018) support this and mentions that arriving at a scene more quickly could offer better opportunities to locate and identify potential witnesses and lead to arresting suspects. It can also contribute to preventing possible evidence contamination or destruction of evidence that can assist an effective investigation. According to College of Policing (2013), the likelihood of protecting, preserving and preventing possible contamination to evidence is increased when an investigation and response to a scene is done quickly. Lee, Lee and Hoover (2016) found this particularly important in domestic abuse incidents and proposed that response time is vital to help prevent injury or even death to victims in such cases. As a result, Salimbene, Nicholas and Zhang (2020) discovered response times can lead to a higher level of satisfaction from the victim.

However, Sherman (2013) identified a study conducted by the Kansas City Police Department, which found that although, in theory, rapid response times suggested more offenders would be caught or crime would be deterred, this was negated and the study concluded that there was no connection between response times and an arrest being a probable outcome. In comparison to another study by Clawson and Chang (1977), this conclusion is vastly isolated. During more recent studies conducted involving burglaries, it's implied that a more rapid response time does result in a higher arrest rate for burglars (Lee, Lee and Hoover, 2016).

Factors Affecting Police Target Response Times

The importance of response times has been well recognised by emergency services all over the world. So much so, studies have been conducted to establish what factors are negatively affecting response times. Salimbene Nicholas and Zhang (2020) suggest that response times can be influenced by the size of the organisation. It's mentioned that larger organisations have stronger hierarchical structure which is more effective at responding to CFS. To support this, a large Police Constabulary such as Avon and Somerset Police, attended 75% of their urban G1 CFS within the TRT in the 2022/23 financial year. Whereas, Gwent Police, a smaller Police Constabulary (National Statistics, 2024), only attended 47% of their G1 CFS within the TRT in the same period (Sampson, 2023) (Gwent Police, 2024).

Furthermore, following the 2010 Spending Review, the Police Service of England and Wales (PSEW) had to make financial savings which caused a 12% reduction in Police Officers between 2010 and 2015 (Elliot-Davies, Donnelly and Van Mechelen, 2016). They also believed that this would have had an adverse impact on the PSEW meeting the demands for CFS.

Rief and Huff (2023) suggest that Police Officers have different cultural norms dependant on the area they patrol. It's proposed that this impacts their decision making, and officers located in high crime areas adapt differently to those located in low crime areas. A study conducted in the U.S.A supports this theory and found that Officers who patrol areas with low crime rates were much more motivated to respond to crime and make an effort to prevent it from reoccurring, suggesting that the response times to CFS could be impacted both positively and negatively depending on the area of which Officers were located (Klinger, 1997). Further evidence supporting the different cultural norms theory, albeit from a contrasting perspective, is provided by Stevens, Webster and Stipak (1980), who's study mentions that patrols are more frequent in areas with high levels of crime and adds that due to having more patrols in these areas the response time is reduced. A Pennsylvania study also revealed that police response times were impacted by factors such as the time the incident was called in and the type of call. It was found that CFS involving incidents with a threat to life or property had faster response times compared to incidents with no threat to life or property (Salimbene, Nicholas and Zhang, 2020).

Lee, Lee and Hoover (2016) explored other factors be linked to police response time and CFS. These were the socioeconomic status and the general ethnicity of the communities. Likewise, Cihan, Zhang and Hoover (2012) refer to claims implying police respond to CFS from disadvantaged communities with ethnic minority, slower than white and affluent communities. Whereas, studies of CFS for in-progress burglaries by Salimbene, Nicholas and Zhang (2020) and Cihan, Zhang and Hoover (2012), discovered that communities that were more disadvantaged received a quicker response time.

In a study to establish the benefits of using single or double crewed police units by Blake and Coupe (2001), it was found that double crewed units responded quicker than single crewed units. However, the study highlights a number of potential influences which could affect the results. Examples include travel times, vehicles with a higher performance and the time of the day. In relation to how the time of day would impact the response time, Blake and Coupe (2001) found that there was no significant difference at all. On the contrary, Cihan, Zhang and Hoover (2012) disagree with this and found that due to less traffic and officers not being committed with other duties as they would be during the day, response times were quicker when attending incidents at night.

Recommendations to Improve Target Response Times

Recommendations to improve response times have been suggested by various researchers. For example, the study conducted by Vidal and Kirchmaier (2018) proposes that employing an extra Police Officer can improve response times. By doing this, its suggested that crime would reduce and lead to a positive financial impact for the Police.

In response to the previously mentioned UK 2010 financial savings, the Government declared that funds would be given to police forces to increase the number of police officers in England and Wales over a period of 3 years. Home Office (2019) states that the increase in officers would provide the public with a better service and it would assist with reducing and preventing crime across the countries. Salimbene, Nicholas and Zhang (2020) support the notion of this reducing crime and discussed that the TRT are significantly influenced by the size of the organisation. Supporting these findings, the research by Elliot-Davies, Donnelly and Van Mechelen (2016) implies that police response times are subject to the relationship of the surrounding communities, suggesting with a better service being provided could lead to better relations with their communities with the end result of helping improve response times. Leigh, Dunnett and Jackson (2017) are supportive of this and their research discovered that police forces patrol areas inefficiently, and improving the way the police patrol areas could largely benefit response times. Furthermore, Cihan, Zhang, and Hoover (2012) found that CFS demand is much higher in communities with a lower socioeconomic status and therefore more units are deployed to these areas.

It's suggested that having more units in areas with this status can help reduce the response time. By following these suggestions, there's a possibility to improve response times and public relations simultaneously.

Although all these recommendations have been identified by various researchers, there is also further suggestion that more research is needed to help improve response times. The research by Lee, Lee, and Hoover (2016) on response times to domestic violence incidents, acknowledges that response times may vary by type of call and therefore suggest further research is required, which is also endorsed by Stevens, Webster and Stipak (1980). Furthermore, Verlaan and Ruiter (2023) argue that research into police response times should 'shift from the current correlational paradigm to a causational paradigm', and it's thought that future research models would benefit from this shift.

The new 20mph speed limits introduced in Wales

As mentioned previously, the Welsh Government has recently implemented a new law for certain roads to change speeds from 30mph to 20mph. This law has been created to help reduce the number of collisions and injuries on the roads, and to help improve public health by encouraging people to walk and cycle more (Welsh Government, 2021).

Due to particular Gwent Police Force Policies, it is possible that the new law may impact TRT within the Gwent Police force. When attending a G1 CFS, Police Officers who are trained in the Standard Driver Entitlement (SDE) driver training are only permitted to exceed the speed limit by 20mph (Gwent Police, 2022). This means, when responding to a G1 CFS, whilst travelling in a 20mph zone, SDE trained officers are now only permitted to travel up to 40mph, as opposed to 50mph previously. These policies are not known to be implemented in other Police Forces in the UK

Welsh Government (2021) recognises a frequently asked question from members of the public. One question highlighted was 'Won't 20mph prevent emergency services from getting to emergency calls on time?', to which the response advised that due to emergency services having exemptions to the speed limits, this would not affect the TRT. This does not take into consideration the Force Policy that's in place within Gwent Police, and Gwent Police (2023) announced that Police officers are to adhere to the Force Policy. Furthermore, Welsh Government (2023) highlights the impact to the change of speed on the road and stated that it is expected that journey times are likely going to be around one minute longer.

The researcher interrogated internal Gwent Police databases for the 2022/23 financial year to gain an understanding on if targets were met prior to the 20mph speed law being implemented. It was found that more than half (53%) of G1 calls

Gwent Police attended did not meet the TRT of 15 minutes. It was also found that less than one third (32.3%) of G2 calls met the TRT of one hour Gwent Police (2022). During this research, further interrogation will be conducted to establish if Gwent Police's TRT have been impacted since the new law has been imposed.

Gaps within the research

There are ample amounts of research relating to Police TRT, however the research is predominantly U.S.A based literature. The studies identified also cover the broad term 'response time', and do not categorise the CFS into sub-categories, which this research aims to do.

Whilst academic studies and Government campaigns identify recommendations to improve Police Services and their response times, more recent research lacks reference to the specific restrictions on Gwent Police Officers. Although there is data available for Gwent Police TRT prior to the new 20mph speed implementation, the data is yet to be reviewed since it has been applied. Furthermore, the 20mph speed limit has not been enforced in other UK countries, which means this research into the impact of this new Welsh law is the first of its kind.

Conclusion

The researcher has been able to explain what a 'response time' is, introduce the different gradings of CFS and the reason for these gradings. It's been highlighted that the TRT can be used to measure how the Police are performing and whether they are meeting their targets to responding to CFS.

Analysing the literature available has evidenced that TRT are important for several key contributors to a police investigation. Studies vastly agree that following TRT assists with identifying a suspect or potential witnesses, prevent the loss of evidence and prevent further harm come to victims of crime. However, there are contrasting views on whether there is a direct link to TRT and a more likely outcome of arrest. Yet studies that focused on a particular crime, such as burglary, disagreed.

Large quantities of studies into TRT have been carried out and delving into these studies highlights the current factors affecting Police TRT. Findings suggest that the organisation size can influence effectiveness to responding to CFS, and in England and Wales, financial savings led to a large reduction of Police Officers and meeting the CFS demand was believed to be seriously impacted. Evidence indicates that the TRT are impacted by the area it has originated from, the socioeconomic status and whether the CFS involved a threat to life. It was implied that areas with higher crime rates, ethnic minority communities and CFS involving threat to life, had a better response from the Police.

The literature has highlighted various methods to improve TRT within the Police. Studies suggest that employing more police officers would improve TRT and the service provided to the public. It was identified that communities with low socioeconomic status were linked to higher crime rates, and it was recommended that more officers were to patrol in these areas. Acting on the recommendations highlighted by previous studies could improve TRT. However, more evidence is required into the type of CFS, such as, burglaries, domestic violence and mental health as TRT may vary between call type.

The researcher has identified a new law to reduce the speed limit to 20mph in Wales and the reason the Welsh Government have implemented this. The lack of literature surrounding this suggests that research on how this has an impact on TRT in Welsh Police Forces has not been carried out. The researcher has reviewed internal statistics to establish Gwent Police TRT prior to the new law and plans to conduct further research into how the new law has impacted TRT, since being enforced.

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