

For this chapter the author will be concluding the research topic by providing a summarisation of the key findings that have been uncovered from the independent study conducted, to establish whether the demand placed upon frontline officers has a detrimental effect on their mental health. The author will also review what limitations were present within the study and propose considerations for future studies of the topic.

This study was conducted by the author to establish whether the demand placed upon frontline officers has a detrimental effect on their mental health and wellbeing. The results indicate that officers are placed under a tremendous amount of stress from several factors both personally and professionally which all affect the individuals mental state.

Queirós et al (2020) will say *“According to recent systematic reviews, being a police officer seems to be a highly demanding and stressful occupation, due to the current characteristics of modern societies. For a police officer, those characteristics include: the uncertainty and danger related to the permanent threat of terrorist attacks, the increase of violence with firearms in urban areas, low human and material resources, team or supervision difficulties, criticism from citizens and society, and lack of understanding from family or friends”*.

Upon commencement of the research it was the authors original hypothesis that the results would support the research question. This indicated that dealing with traumatic incidents routinely would play a major part in the decline of the officer’s personal wellbeing, coupled with the fact officers are reluctant to seek support for such matters.

This is heavily supported by current literature which has been extensively analysed by the author to support their findings. Olsen and Wasilewski (2016) claim *“Too often, perhaps because of the nature of cops, the job, and even police culture, officers going through personal crisis or even debilitating emotional upsets feel they have nowhere to turn or the stigma attached to admitting the need for help would be taken as a sign of weakness or indication they are no longer fit or trustworthy to do the job”*.

However, from the independent study conducted it has become apparent to the author that although dealing with traumatic incidents indisputably plays a part on the officer’s mental wellbeing, this is a subjective matter and how the incident affects the individual is unique to them. This is due to several variables such as routine exposure to traumatic incidents whereby the officer is no longer affected by these or the individual’s firmness in dealing with incidents as no two officers will have the same mindset. Ellison (2004) says *“He’s strong; he can take anything, he goes to pieces over the least little problem. Comments of this sort spotlight the*

*common belief that there are large individual differences in the way of people handle pressure”.*

The findings identified by the author indicate that although it is apparent that dealing with major incidents will have an impact on an officer's mental wellbeing, this is purely subjective and not all will share the same concerns. Moreover the findings uncovered by the author indicate that it the culmination of everyday obstacles and stressors such as lack of support from team mates and superiors, having a high workload with limited time to conduct the required investigations and being routinely short staffed are the main causes that have a detrimental effect on officers mental wellbeing. Ellison (2004) will say “*Stress at work also comes from poor relationships with superiors, colleagues, and subordinates*”.

The author was able to identify these findings due to conducting a questionnaire amongst serving frontline officers of Gwent Police. The objective of the questionnaire was to gather impartial quantitative and qualitative data that would voice the concerns and stresses of frontline officers within various ranks and departments.

The questionnaire implemented by the author supports the initial theory that the demand placed upon officers is detrimental to their mental wellbeing, this is supported by the findings uncovered within the questionnaire. More importantly the research conducted was able to identify that it is not just isolated incidents of exposure to traumatic incidents that cause ill mental health, but the continuous occupational stressors that culminate which more commonly causes mental health illnesses such as anxiety and depression. These mental illnesses are extremely prevalent in law enforcement globally.

Queirós et al (2020) state “*Research has demonstrated that policing is a stressful occupation and that this stress has a negative impact on police officers' mental and physical health, performance, and interactions with citizens. Mental health at the workplace has become a concern due to the costs of depression, anxiety, burnout, and even suicide, which is high among police officers*”.

Although there has been extensive research conducted on traumatic incidents being the main catalyst for ill mental health within the police, seldom has there been research conducted on the hypothesis that the most common cause of anxiety and depression among police officers

originates from organisational stressors that officers face daily. Therefore, the author was able to identify a gap in the current literature and sought to provide insight to address the gaps identified from the findings. In addition to this most of the published literature has been conducted among Law enforcement in the United States, the author has chosen to conduct their research in the city of Newport, Wales where seldom research has been conducted to offer a new perspective on the research question.

The study conducted by the author confirms the current theories that have been well documented in the published literature, such as officers dealing with mental health related illnesses have risen exponentially in recent years. Ridderbusch (2021) has said *“A 2019 study by the University of Texas at Dallas found that 26% of police officers screened positive for a mental health condition, such as burnout, anxiety, depression or PTSD”*.

However, the vast amount of research published heavily focusses on traumatic incidents such as dealing with deaths or the impact of being a victim of assault as the main factor that has a detrimental affect on wellbeing. The study conducted by the author supports these theories but also provides valuable insight into the factors that are not so heavily researched, such as lack of faith in the organisation and difficulties with IT systems causing anxiety which ultimately has a detrimental effect on frontline officers mental health.

The author would consider this research study to overall be a success and feels they have achieved their objective upon commencing this study. Although the author was able to gather a wealth of data on the research topic that were not explored in depth within the current literature there were however several limitations to the study. The main factor of this was the sample size of participants, in comparison to likewise published studies the author was only able to gather a sample size of forty. With the research topic being so complex in nature the sample size was only able to provide a brief account of a small section of officers from the Gwent police force.

Due to the small number of participants and the fact they are part of one police force the findings are not indicative of other forces and may not represent how officers in other forces feel on the matter. Faber and Fonseca (2014) both claim *“An appropriate sample renders the research more efficient: Data generated are reliable, resource investment is as limited as possible, while conforming to ethical principles. The use of sample size calculation directly*

*influences research findings. Very small samples undermine the internal and external validity of a study”.*

Another major limitation present was that of time constraints for both the author and participants, due to both being frontline officers time was finite. As a result some of the participants had limited time to complete the questionnaire in between carrying out their duties, as such although they were able to provide responses that were extremely beneficial to the author some responses were very limited due to time. The Royal College of Physicians (2016) have stated *“Drawn from the findings of a survey of almost 2,000 doctors, the report shows that respondents cited the lack of time as having a ‘significant impact’ on their ability to engage in research”.*

Lastly an important factor that can not be overlooked is the lack of experience of the author, despite best attempts undoubtedly there are aspects that could have been improved such as the questionnaire that would have yielded better responses if conducted a researcher with extensive knowledge on the matter.

The author has been able to identify areas for improvement to enable future research to be more effective. Moving forward it is the authors belief that to comprehensively provide data on such a complex subject that the sample size would need to be greatly improved. Zamboni (2018) states *“Sample size is an important consideration for research. Larger sample sizes provide more accurate mean values, identify outliers that could skew the data in a smaller sample and provide a smaller margin of error”.*

In addition to the this the sample should be spread among various forces to establish if officers share the same concerns or if some forces deal with matters differently, which could provide valuable insight and opportunity for improvement. Another important consideration would be to seek approval from supervisors to ensure that the participants and author are given time to be able to effectively complete the questionnaires. In keeping with this if the author had no time constraints it would have been advantageous to conduct face to face interviews which would have allowed a dialogue between both the author and participant which potentially could have uncovered more findings.

The purpose of the research was to establish whether the demand of frontline policing has a detrimental impact on mental health and to investigate the root causes of this. From the findings it is evident that the demand placed upon police officers heavily impacts their mental health negatively. Participants of the research study were able to offer impartial feedback and identified that although dealing with traumatic incidents does undoubtedly have a negative impact on mental health it is in fact the daily issues they face such as complicated IT systems, lack of support from colleagues or superiors and being regularly short staffed that has the main impact on wellbeing.

The findings therefore support the authors original hypothesis but through the study they have been able to identify other factors that are seldom addressed. A vast amount of the literature available is focused on American Law enforcement but little research has been conducted in the United Kingdom in comparison, particularly among Welsh police forces.

In order to effectively explore the cause of routine stress for Gwent officers, the author wished to address what daily factors affect wellbeing. The distain for the IT systems within Gwent police was a common theme amongst participants, however there were other factors present which were voiced by the participants such as having little faith in their colleagues which only increases the stress placed upon them. The findings detailed from this study indicate that whilst the majority of the forces efforts from a wellbeing standpoint are concentrated on how to offer support for one off traumatic incident, such as the Trim process.

Northumbria Police Federation (No Date) will say *“TRiM is not a medical intervention, but a voluntary, peer led support system designed to help police officers and staff deal with traumatic events they may encounter during the course of their everyday work. It enables early identification of normal post trauma reactions, and those reactions which may require additional intervention via an initial and follow up assessment process”*.

In comparison little is done to offer support for the countless daily occupational stressors that are left untreated and are having the most detrimental effect to officer’s mental wellbeing.

Word Count – 1515

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