

1. What impact can the challenges of operational policing have on individual and group wellbeing? Why is it important to manage mental wellbeing in policing?

This essay will explore what challenges of operational policing have on individuals and groups wellbeing. The essay will look at the importance of managing mental wellbeing in policing. The essay will seek to identify the root cause for decline in wellbeing in frontline officers and how individuals and groups can build resilience to cope with stressful incidents. I have supported my work with evidence-based research which is referenced.

Operational policing brings different levels of challenges which can have an impact on both individuals and group wellbeing due to the high-stress nature employees face with repeated exposure to traumatic incidents. Front line staff, such as police officers who respond to emergency calls are routinely exposed to traumatic incidents which inherently makes them vulnerable to the adverse impacts of mental health. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, a traumatic event is “a shocking, scary, or dangerous experience that can affect someone emotionally and physically” (2024). There are varying levels of mental health which can impact a group or individuals based on the severity.

In a survey conducted by Mind with police personnel found a majority of respondents, 70.4% stated that they had personal experience of mental health problems. The most common reported mental health problem experienced by police personnel was anxiety at 53.6%, depression at 51.3% and PTSD at 16.9% (2019). There are limitations to these findings with the survey only being completed by approx. 2,103 serving police personnel. However, this data is supported by the findings from Police Federation which represents the majority of serving police officers in England and Wales with a survey they conducted with members found 73% of officers indicating they are actively looking to leave the force due to mental health and wellbeing impacts of the job role (February, 2024). These high rates of officers feeling the impact of mental health or indication of leaving puts additional pressures on the organisation operationally. If there is poor retention of experienced and trained officers this creates a spiral effect whereby those still working in the organisation at a reduced operational capacity are expected to fill these gaps. It is recognised that mental health is one of the key costs of the UK economy as a result of loss in productivity related to sickness absence, turnover in staff and unemployment which cost England alone approx. £300 billion in 2022 according to Centre for Mental Health which was commissioned by the National Health Service (Race equality foundation, 2024).

The above findings show a high percentage of serving officers currently suffering with mental health. Avon and Somerset Police Federation state, police officers are likely to encounter between 400 to 600 traumatic events in their career where most citizens would only experience up to four in their lifetime (2021). This high exposure to trauma has been contributed to a high percentage of officers suffering with varying levels of mental health. A freedom of information request from the Office of National Statistics shows between the period of 2019 – 2023 there was on average an estimated 1,560 deaths by suicide in the United Kingdom (2023). This statistical information demonstrates there is a high ratio of those serving in police which have lost their lives by means of suicide which is significantly higher than officers that have lost their lives in the line of duty. This data is limited as it is unclear the circumstances in the individual background of these figures but it is clear that mental

health is the most serious occupational health risk posed by officers and staff. This data is supported by the UK national data recorded for suicides which is one the leading causes of death in the UK with on average there being 15 suicides in England and Wales per day (GovUK, 2024).

It is unpreventable that officers are going to see traumatic incidents given the nature of the job role, but it is important that emergency service workers are supported by their organisation to identify healthy life-style choices which can support their mental resilience and implementing procedures which support staff who have been exposed to traumatic incidents.

There are several police services in the United Kingdom which has adopted the TRiM referral system which was a mental health triage system adopted from the military which identifies anyone who has been exposed to a traumatic incident and invites them to speak to a trained TRiM practitioner. The practitioner will carry out an assessment on a 1-1 basis to identify if someone needs additional professional support such as a councillor or therapy. The aim of TRiM is to identify those in need of support and reduce the number of trauma-related mental health sickness developing into more severe form such as PTSD. A study conducted by E.Hunt, N.Jones, V.Hastings and N.Greenberg looked at the deployment of TRiM by Cumbria Constabulary in a major incident involving a number of fatalities. The TRiM referral identified 717 police officers and civilians' employees exposed to trauma. The use of TRiM was found to have a reduction on the psychological impacts from initial appointment to the 1-month follow up appointment. Those who engaged with the TRiM process reflected with a reduction in the level of sickness absence from work (Oxford Academic, 2013). The use of TRiM in this instance shows the importance of early intervention and support by the organisation. Those who participated in the process returned to work sooner resulting in less stress on others due to reduced staffing levels. There are limitations to TRiM with it being a voluntary take up, therefore it is possible those who are referred that do not take up the service could develop more serious mental health related sickness as a consequence of not processing trauma at an early prevention stage.

There are contributing factors which are not influenced by an individual but tested due to organisational resilience being poor in comparison to the demand for the service. An inspection by HMICFRS into Gwent Police revealed that the force's response to the public was inadequate, with calls not being answered within the national standard time frame. The report highlighted the strain caused to the organisation due to a 9% reduction in the workforce over the past decade and a 12% increase in crime over the last five years (2023). These pressures are also exacerbated by the irregular work hours incorporated with the nature of the role and often high workloads resulting in personal lives being often intruded due to officers working overtime to fill gaps. These pressures can also impact the morale within a team with cumulative stresses causing a lack of team cohesion due to added pressures of workloads and potential conflict within team. This can be managed by a positive approach by the organisation to the stigmas surrounding mental health. Ultimately, if the organisation looks after the wellbeing of staff this will result in better operational capacity with less staff being absent as a result of poor mental health and officers can make informed decisions under pressure with the building blocks of having good resilience. It is recognised there are circumstances which are not in the remit or control of the organisation, such as instance of high media scrutiny as a result of high-profile incidents or in particular criminal cases involving officers

which lead to potential public trust issues and damaging the morale of serving police officers. This has been intensified by the online use of social media hatred of disinformation online, an example of this can be seen in recent riots in the UK which resulted in officers being injured and facing traumatic incidents as a result of disinformation.

It is important that individuals implement good lifestyle choices to enable them to have the best levels of resilience to deal with the pressures of not just their work-life but their personal too. There are a number of things that can help build these foundations according to the Mental Health foundation and the National Health Service a balanced diet, a consistent workout routine, socialising and having approx. 7-8 hours sleep per night have proven benefits for increasing a persons' wellbeing and resilience (2022). There is a degree of limitations to this with those working within policing will increasingly find it difficult to achieve a healthy sleep pattern with the rotation of shift-pattern leaving individuals with a jet leg feeling. Research conducted by Dr Sarag Chellappa found working night shifts disturbs the bodies circadian rhythms which is an internal clock that controls when we are awake and sleep. The research also found those who work nightshift are at higher risk of depression like systems if they ate at night, as well as a number of other diseases (February, 2024). The World Health Organisation has classified night shift work as a probable cause of cancer due to the disruption in the circadian rhythms (BBC, December, 2017). Although there are clear health implications as a result of working night-shifts it does have it perks with police officers working a rota which means they have more time off than the average 9-5 office worker.

The wellbeing of a group within teams can often face challenges with the cumulative stress that a team face from organisation changes, operational challenges and government directives. In 2010 policing in the UK faced its largest change with the reduction of approx. twenty thousand operational police officers with a government-led budget cut to the service (The Guardian, 2024). This ultimately reduced the capacity of policing resulting in officers seeing demand on their individual workloads increase, as the population and crime rates increased over this period (Statista, 2023). During the same period as part of the wave of cuts there was an approx. 70% of police stations which has proven to have an increase in violent crimes in census conducted of the impacted areas of these closures (IFS, 2024). The reduction has since been reverted with the implementation of operation uplift in late 2019.

In conclusion, operational policing presents unique challenges that significantly affect both individual and group wellbeing, particularly due to the repeated exposure to traumatic incidents. The high levels of anxiety, depression, PTSD and the troubling statistics on suicide rates among police officers highlight the critical need for mental health support within the profession. While initiatives such as TRiM have shown promise in early intervention and reducing the impact of trauma this is limited to those who are identified and engage with the process from an early onset from the exposure of trauma. The research shows how individuals can build their resilience with personal lifestyle choices, but this often does face limitations due to the demand and irregular nature of police work, including night shifts and long hours. Ultimately, addressing the mental health crisis in policing requires a combination of organizational, governmental reforms, development of mental health initiatives within the organisation and efforts to mitigate the physical and psychological toll on the profession. Without implementing changes to policing the wellbeing of police officers and other frontline staff

will consequently feel the effects and continue to compromise the effectiveness of the organisation operationally.

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2. What lessons have been learned from recent high-profile critical and major incidents, and how have these translated into best practice for policing?

This essay will reflect of recent high-profile critical and major incidents within the UK and internationally. It will analysis the key lessons that have been learnt by involved agencies and what best practices have been implemented for policing. I have supported my work with evidence- based research which is referenced and have referenced recent high-profile incidents which are of significant. There have been a number of major incidents which have resulted in public inquiries and investigations which the findings have established better working practices and standards to respond to similar incidents in the future.

A significant high-profile major incident was declared in Manchester after a radicalised teenager detonated an improvised explosive in 2017 resulting in the death of 22 people. The initial response to the incident by the emergency services has been noted as being heroic with members of the police service quickly on scene dealing with a war zone type incident with the sheer volume of casualties. A public inquiry was conducted, chaired by The Hon, Sir John Saunders who highlighted heroism displayed by responders and staff working at the venue that night, but there was a number of serious failures identified and learning points implemented as a result. The first aspect was the lack of communication between departmental services with the police inspector not coordinating with other services to declare that Operation Plato which is a pre-arranged plan for suspected marauding terrorist attacks which covers a wide range of attack methods and response solutions.

The report highlighted the insufficient response by the Ambulance Service resulting in not enough paramedics and specially trained Hazardous Response teams not being deployed to the area, thus resulting in the delay of triage of the critically injured patients at the arena. The report looked at the failure to the fire service to attend the rendezvous point which was establish for an estimated two hours due to concerns of personal safety meaning valuable resources were unavailable to aid the wounded and their specialist training in extracting those who needed medical care. The report highlighted the seriousness of not implementing the key principles concerning the JESIP model which is a joint decision model for emergency services to effectively work together (2022). There are five key JESIP principles which should be followed during a major incident which are co-locate, communicate, co-ordinate, jointly understand risk and shared situational awareness which allows interoperability between agencies to work effectively (JESIP, 2024).

There was a number of recommendations which have been since implemented by services as a result of the inquiry conducted. The report recommended that all emergency service control rooms have training to provide basic trauma advice, and not just the ambulance service. It recognised that the counter-terrorism message by the UK Government of “see, tell and hide” is not appropriate in

moment persons are critically injured when members of the public can also provide first aid to the wounded, as a result control rooms no longer pass this message during a 999 call of this nature whereby medical assistance can be given by a bystander. It was recognised the need to develop the training of those in the police and fire service to provide lifesaving trauma interventions, such as being trained on how to apply a tourniquet and opening an airway (College of Policing, 2023. GMFRS, 2023). There is now a requirement for medical personnel to be organised by the venue prior to the event taking place, so there are sufficient medically trained persons at the venue during the event which is comparable to the number of people attending (CJPI, 2023). If there is significant risk threshold identified for an event an Ambulance Liaison Officer must be present at the event, so they provide an early METHANE message in an event of a major incident (National Health Service, 2023). These changes allow services to more effectively communicate with each other to establish a clear command structure to respond to the incident and ensure that there is adequate training by all services when faced with a similar event in the future, if it occurs. All the services have since been working on joint exercises to train in preparedness of incidents of a terrorism nature and other critical/major incidents.

In 2011 the United Kingdom saw record levels of violent disorder with a critical incident being declared as a result of peaceful protest turned to violent disorder after the death of Mark Duggan who was shot dead by armed police after intelligence suggested he was in possession of a live firearm. The riots resulted in local business being looted, burnt down, assaults against police and widespread disorder for five consecutive days (Sky News, 2021). During the period of disorder, the number of officers initially deployed was found to be inadequate to the response with only 3,000 police officers being deployed, but after a number of days this was increased to an approx. 16,000 officers deployed on the streets to deal with the disorder specifically (The Week, 2021). It was estimated that the damage caused during these riots was at approx. £250 millions worth to local shops and businesses in London alone. The Crown Prosecution Service in conjunction with the government imposed swift harsh sentences to deter people from being in bolden to undertake such action with more than approx. 2,000 people handed custodial prison sentences.

The Independent Office for Police conduct carried out an investigation into the killing of Mark Duggan and found no wrong doing by the officer that had killed him. In a report published by Her Majesties Inspectorate found that police forces across the country needed to review the level of officers trained to deal with public order duties and balance these with other policing demands. HMIC proposed the implementation of a new national framework which aims to maintain order, ensuring both the police and the government has the same expectations set out on the capability and mobilisation of specially trained Public Order officers (2011). It is recognised that these are only limited reviews which have been conducted by independent organisations from the police or their governing bodies which means it does not bring a full scope of understanding of the causes and potential resolution to the riots without a public inquiry being conducted. On reflection it would have been of benefit from public bodies to be more transparent concerning the steps they were taken to investigate the concerns and the circumstances surrounding Mark Duggan death which could have help prevent public tensions deescalate.

Although a recent event which the lessons learnt are being analysed by public bodies, the recent riots in the United Kingdom after a 17-year-old teenager had murdered three girls and injured ten more children at a Taylor Swift themed dance class in Southport saw record levels of far-right rioting which had not been seen since 2011 in the United Kingdom. It was established the main cause of the riots stem from disinformation which was stir up online, according to the University of London within 2 hours of the news being reported there was social media post which falsely claimed the attacker was an asylum seeker or a Muslim immigrant which spread over social media creating tensions in communities between far-right protesters and those of an ethnic minority. The protests outside mosques and asylum centres rapidly turned into violent disorder with people being assaulted, looting and damage to places of worship. The article states that people do not riot over one single factor, highlighting the cost of living and other cumulative factors (2024).

The institute for Government highlights how the justice system is inadequately equipped to deal with this level of disorder as a result of austerity cut backs in critical infrastructure such as our prison services, fewer judges and the volume of evidence police staff/officers are expected to deal with in comparison to 2011 is overwhelming (2024). The police and the government clearly communicate with members of the public via the media with a zero-tolerance approach to the violent disorder with swift criminal proceedings against approx. 470 people being charged with violence related offences with a growing number of cases going before the court (Sky News, 2024). These riots did bring it challenges to the police with the high-volume of disorder demonstrates the need to grow the number of specially trained officers that can deal with public disorder with a growing percentage of officers of a younger in-service status. For conclusive learning and to understand the cause of such violent disorder there needs to be a public inquiry established to understand firstly what were the main causes and if social media played a vital role in stirring up the violence with recent news networks stating potential involvement by foreign state, Russia although there is no certain information from government bodies to-date which have established that Russia or other foreign states have had any involvement (Daily Express, 2024). The inquiry will also be able to look at the response by the police and the inadequacies currently in the criminal justice system with the prison system being reported at running at record levels of capacity.

In conclusion, the research and analysis of recent high-profile incidents involved in the United Kingdom highlights the importance of continuous learning, reflection and implementing good working practices within policing and emergency services.

The Manchester Arena bombing in 2017 and the subsequent public inquiry found significant shortcomings in communication, coordination, and response that have since led to the implementation of reforms and better working practices. The introduction of enhanced joint training exercises between emergency services in conjunction with partner agencies, the revision of communication protocols, and the expansion of training provided for trauma care and basic first aid shows clear progression in this area to ensure a robust and effective response in future incidents of these nature.

Likewise, the 2011 UK riots and the recent disorder following the Southport attack demonstrate the evolving nature of public order challenges that the police are facing in the 21st Century, particularly in the context of misinformation and community unrest. The increase in specially trained public order officers and the development of a national framework for public order management are steps toward more robust and adaptable policing strategies. However, the need for further analysis through public inquiries remains apparent, particularly in understanding the broader social issues that contribute to such unrest.

Finally, the lessons drawn from these incidents reflect a wider understanding that policing and emergency response are dynamic fields requiring ongoing evaluation and reform. As new threats emerge, whether in the form of terrorism, civil unrest, or misinformation fuel by violence, it is imperative that the lessons from past incidents continue to inform the development of best practices. By doing so, agencies and public bodies which serve these communities can better protect public safety, maintain order, and uphold public trust in an increasingly challenging world.

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