

Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

The usage of force within the context of policing, is a contested topic, as it is a “defining feature of the police” (Quinton *et al* 2020); with social pressures being applied in recent times such as within the case of protests associated with the murder of George Floyd, an increased usage of force has been witnessed not just globally , but within England and Wales as well. Within these two nations the armament of police primarily is limited to the use of conducted energy devices (CEDs) or “Tasers” as they are more popularly known as. The usage of these devices in scenarios has often called for a “long standing debate about police accountability” (Dymond, 2022), with legislation surrounding taser usage first implemented in British legislation nationally in 2008, this eighteen-year presence of CED’s has created a large divide within social circles and inadvertently affected the procedures and attitudes of police officers themselves. However, due to rising violent crime statistics, where the use of force continuum is commonly put into practice police officers are “legally and morally required to use the lowest level of force necessary to control a situation” (Bleetman *et al*, 2004) and this is where the introduction and usage of the taser plays a key role in keeping officers and the public safe , and giving everyone within the scenario the best chance of survival.

Aims and objectives:

Aim- Critically analyse the public perception of taser usage within South Wales and Dyfed Powys Police services.

Objective 1: Highlight and identify the primary legislation which allows taser trained officers to use their munitions within the use of force pyramid.

Objective 2: Analyse and the public's view of taser usage by police officers

Objective 3: Propose recommendations on how the public perceptions of taser usage can be used to inform policing and its practices.

1.2-Identification of legislation.

As previously mentioned, the introduction of the conducted energy device (CED) within 2003 did add upon the options available to police officers when in violent situations ; allowing officers to furtherly enact their “general duty to protect persons and property” (College of Policing, 2003), in conjunction with the police and criminal evidence act of 1984 (PACE) which oversees the lawful use of force by police officers when enacting any form of policing within the pace framework (stop and search, interviewing and detention) , the act of prescribing any measure of force to a person is contained within section 117 of PACE 1984. These legislations primarily downfall lays within its application and interpretation by police officers. An example of this is the case of Edwin Afriyie v City of London Police where the use of a taser was “not objectively reasonable in the circumstances” (Dugan, 2024), this lack of

proportionate usage by police officers is often seen in cases not just within England and Wales , but globally as well , attributing poor training as a key factor ; the Home Office (2024) “a total of 1,698 individuals were referred to formal misconduct proceedings” providing a clear insight to the conduct of police within England and Wales and the public's experience of police misconduct in the context of the application of force.

In the context of the taser usage itself, the conducted energy device can be used by police officers lawfully due to the legislation of section 5 (1) (b) of the Firearms Act of 1968. As CED's are prohibited for public use under this act, this legislation does allow “Only specially trained and authorized police officers to carry and deploy these devices in the United Kingdom” (LegalClarity, 2025). This segregation of use by the majority of people (public and police) does act as a positive point to CED use within the UK, allowing for only specific officers within England and Wales to use these devices, acting as a mitigating factor for those officers who may use CED's unlawfully within violent scenarios. On the other hand, this positive factor is not without its limitations, primarily on the real-world application of the legislation, more specifically of how these specialist police officers which carry CED's act personally within the public view. This is evident within the University of Cambridge study in which (Ariel, 2018) found that “the use of force by officers carrying stun guns was 48% higher than among those who were unarmed”, this statistic shows how the presence of a CED , even when in the possession of a trained specialist officer allows for a more forceful and violent policing of the law.

Finally, within the context of the legislation surrounding CED's, the use of force by police officers in any context does affect someone in any scenario, the recipient of the acts of the force continuum is protected by the European court of Human Rights (ECHR) , more specifically Article 2 or "right to life" segment , which acts as "an instrument for the protection of individual human beings" (European Court of Human Rights 2025) this protects victims of potential police misuse of force. A prominent example of this within modern day legislation is the case of R (Dunne) v IOPC & Officer TP7 [2023] in which case ECHR Article 2 was not upheld, and significant damage was caused to the victim due to extreme, unproportionate violence in the name of "use of force" procedures. This use of accountability from the public and their negative view of policing has become extremely prominent in modern day society. With events such as the murder of George Floyd and other victims such as Simeon Francis in 2020 led to "over 450 protests taking place" (Godiard , 2020), globally and within the United Kingdom. This increase in scrutiny and application of Article 2 of the ECHR has allowed for more accountability in the terms of the use of force continuum, aiding in the publics knowledge of how police can conduct themselves within possibly violent situations.

In conclusion of this, the legislation enacted by the police services in England and Wales are perceived as fair by much of the public, but contradicting this; the way in which the police apply these laws may be seen as unjust; with (Nash , 2018) stating that "the public could be argued to be more afraid of a lack of accountability taken by police" due to the actions of a select few who allow personal factors to change their interpretation of the law for worse.

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1.3 - Analysis of public view of CED usage.

However, the people who are protected by the users of CED's (Police) are the public, this symbiotic relationship with law enforcement, especially within recent years has been shown to be turbulent , with "54% of adults in Great Britain thought the police were doing a good job, down from 72% in October 2019." (Owen-Evans *et al*, 2024) this decrease in public confidence and trust within the English and Welsh police services may be attributed to several factors, economic and social. In the context of CED usage, taser usage within the United Kingdom may be viewed as a catalyst of this mistrust with the previously mentioned 450 police brutality protests within the UK and globally being a causality of the actions of the police officers who act unlawfully. Statistically "A 2019 survey of more than 4,000 people revealed that 66% would feel safer if every officer in their community carried a Taser" (Chambers, 2024), this recent study carried out in 2019 perceives the positive view that the public had regarding CED usage and of the police as an agency, it is important to

note the date of this survey , as it is before the murder of George Floyd and the following protests which occurred in 2020 due to the long term growing mistrust in the police (2020-2023), within 2023 the usage of CED's became even more controversial and is mirrored within 2025. With a recent study by (Bradford, 2023) shows that within the United Kingdom there is a "statistical relationship between ethnicity and increased use of Taser relative to other uses of force in some areas." , this relationship shows the negative aspects taser usage has within the public , showing not just the physical implications of taser usage itself as a device, but the societal rifts it has created due to the systemic racism which is ever present within police services in the UK.

However, the perception of taser usage can be linked to the public's perception of safety within their communities alongside their perception of violent crime with "Tasers seen as an effective deterrent against violent crime, enhancing community safety." (Deuchar *et al*, 2024) this want and necessity of community safety is present within the vast majority of citizens within the United Kingdom wanting to live in peace and safety. In the context of this research, within Wales the usage of CED's is prominent within violent situations, with "CEDs being recorded as a tactic in 33,421 cases" (Home Office, 2025) this number shows the availability of CED's to police and can also reflect the attitudes of the public towards them, with a population of 3.19 million in 2024 the 33,421 recordings of CED usage may not only show the nature of the need to restrain individuals but an insight into the nature of incidents which require CED's to be used. This statistical relationship may reveal how the public's negative perception of the police can lead to more violent situations, increasing the mistrust and lack of action in the police service, creating a violent and viscous circle in which the police must manage under ever-growing pressures.

In conclusion to the perception of CED usage by the public, the negative actions of a select few police officers have ignited rising tensions and negative attitudes towards police, often requiring physical force to combat this, police services within England and Wales have found themselves in a cyclical battle which will be difficult to win , with accountability and a reliance on other non-physical measures such as communication needing to become to standard for the diffusion of violent scenarios.

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1.4- Proposing recommendations on policing practices.

The police services within England and Wales, do follow a code of conduct and practice when CED usage is required within a scenario, however recommendations can be made to enable an increase in effectiveness in their actions and to ease public tension towards taser usage. Within the Dyfed Powys Police region, geographically the region itself acts as a catalyst for taser usage on many occasions, the rural nature of the areas provides continual problems logistically in terms of travel and resources with (Dyfed Powys Police 2025) stating that “Rurality impacts the way we serve and engage with the public” this geographical aspect may increase response times , furtherly increasing tension at a violent scenario and increasing the chance that a CED may need to be deployed , a recommendation for this may include the increase of logistics and officers available to there “Rural Crime Unit”, which may allow for lower response times and more efficient methods of policing. On the other hand, even within the more urban areas, due to the rural nature of the region economic support is often lacking in comparison to other forces, a repercussion of this is an increase in mental health support, an increase in mental health calls to police has been shown to cause an increase in taser usage so a focus on the category of “people with mental health concerns” (IOPC, 2021), will allow for a more efficient standard of policing and making sure that CED’s are not used on someone who may require alternative support (healthcare and other emergency agencies).

On the other hand, the South Wales police region is predominantly more urban in nature in comparison to Dyfed Powys, creating a different set of problems and solutions as opposed to Dyfed Powys. Due to a higher population density and number in comparison to the Dyfed Powys Police region over “1.3 million people” (South Wales Police, 2024) the increased requirement of policing leads to an

overlook in people who are at risk. And within the context of CED usage the younger population suffer at an increased cost due to this with the use of CEDs on “children 112 times” (Haines, 2025) this alarming statistic displays the need for an early intervention and prevention for children to be in scenarios where a CED is needed, and a higher need for training and accountability on officers who are in these scenarios , with a critical call for training and preventative methods being needed to ensure that harm is not caused to the child.

1.5 - Conclusion

In conclusion, the usage of CED within the United Kingdom is perceived by the public within literature as a contrasting necessity of policing, with the necessity of being safe within communities often clashing with the need of accountability for officers who often misuse there CED and often cause unlawful harm to victims, with South Wales Police “set to double the number of officers it has trained to use Tasers” (Jukes, 2018) this dispersion of the consensus of taser usage by the public is only going to grow bigger in time, with more radical replys from both sides of the debate developing because of this. From a localised perspective. In the context of this research, Dyfed Powys Police have been seen to combat this separation, by creating a “preventative” measure called the “adult protection plan” which is aimed to deliver a “consistent and professional approach to safeguarding adults” (Dyfed Powys Police, 2024) this safeguarding measure will not only decrease the need for CED usage by officers , but will allow officers to be seen in a more positive view by the public , increasing police trust in the region. However, this positive, pro-active

approach is often not seen across England and Wales, allowing for a negative perception of taser usage to be cultivated in a high number of the population with statistics showing that the trust in police “trends remained flat or increased only marginally until 2017/18, after which they started to decline”(College of Policing, 2024) it is important that the recommendations and changes in training are applied sooner rather than later to ensure that the use of CED’s does not need to be increased and the public's trust in the police services within the United Kingdom can be restored to a positive place.

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