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What impact does the media have on the public's perception of British Policing, and what effect does that have on officers?

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: 

Date: 25th JULY 2025

STATEMENT 1

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA.

Signed: 

Date: 25th JULY 2025

STATEMENT 2

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to ascertain and emphasize any connections that might exist between the quality of news disseminated through different media channels and to gain a deeper understanding of the possible effects it may exert on public perceptions of policing in the UK and its police officers. The research sought to determine whether any of these potential effects hindered officers in their capacity to perform their daily duties.

The researcher conducted a comprehensive and detailed review of the relevant literature and sources pertaining to the topic and research question. The literature and sources examined were specifically focused on search results from news media and their impact on public perception of the UK Police.

During the data collection process the aim was to enhance the investigation with pertinent information, the researcher decided to implement two open web surveys. These surveys were specifically directed at members of the UK public as well as UK police officers. The primary objective of the public survey was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the existing levels of confidence in UK policing, alongside their interaction with media, and to determine whether this interaction affected their perceptions of the UK police. Conversely, the secondary survey targeted both current and retired officers to explore their views on whether media coverage, whether negative or positive, influenced public reception and whether it hindered their capacity to perform their duties effectively.

The findings of the study offered distinct insights and substantial evidence supporting the themes and assertions presented later in the research. This investigation served as a means to clarify the ambiguous boundaries of scepticism and gather direct feedback from both parties. Consequently, it enabled us to assess the effects of both negative and positive

media coverage, the prevailing public confidence in UK police, the experiences of officers influenced by reported media, and their capacity to perform their duties.

At completion of the investigation, it is clear that the dissertation has successfully fulfilled its objective by addressing the question: "What impact does the media have on the public's perception of British Policing, and what effect does that have on officers?"

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to identify and closely examine existing links between main news media in its various means and its effect on public perception of UK Policing along with the effect it has on the UK Police Officers. News or media as defined in 'The Handbook of Journalism Studies' refers to the methods utilized for disseminating news and information to the general public via a variety of channels and platforms. These channels encompass Print media (such as newspapers and magazines), Broadcast media (including television and radio news), Digital/online media (like news websites, social media platforms, and podcasts), as well as Wire services (for instance, Associated Press and Reuters). (The Handbook of Journalism Studies, 2009).

The media significantly influences how the public perceives the police. Media representations of policing can question and contest police actions, thereby raising issues of accountability. A research study carried out in California investigated how crime-related media consumption affects individuals' views on the police. The findings revealed that media exposure impacts three key areas of police performance: public confidence in the police, perceptions of police fairness, and concerns regarding police use of excessive force. (Morrell, 2015)

In recent times the media has been seen to report a huge decrease in the public confidence of British policing and its officers. A recent YouGov survey indicates a decline in the percentage of British public who approve of the police's performance.

In February 2020, 70% of British public felt that the police were doing well. However, at present, only 53% of the public express this view, while the proportion of individuals criticizing the police's performance has more than doubled, rising from 15% to 37%. It was reported that numbers fell from 51% to 42%, Londoners don't trust the Metropolitan Police. (YouGov, 2023).

The objective of this study is to determine whether there are any connections between the decline in police popularity and public satisfaction, which may stem from adverse media coverage related to law enforcement.

1.2 Background and Rationale

British policing operates on the foundation of consent, which implies that the police's capacity to perform their duties is contingent upon the public's endorsement of their presence, actions, and conduct. The nine principles of policing by consent, commonly known as the Peelian principles, were formulated by Sir Robert Peel. Policing by consent represents a core principle that forms the foundation of contemporary democratic societies. It is a notion based on the understanding that the legitimacy of the police stems from the agreement and collaboration of the community they protect, rather than from the authority of the government. This does not imply that the consent of a single person is sufficient. No individual has the option to revoke their consent from the police or from any law. (Ministry Of Justice, 2025)

There have been many studies conducted into the public perceptions of British Policing; one such study was conducted by the Home Office in March 2023. (Home Office, 2023). In 2008, the Home Office implemented the Government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) as a benchmark for assessing public confidence in the police service (Home Office, 2008). By 2010, this measure, along with other performance indicators in policing, was discontinued. Nevertheless, public confidence continues to be a fundamental priority and issue for every police force throughout England and Wales, and, to a certain degree, it is still evaluated (Javid and Morrell, 2019).

When law enforcement personnel observe a deterioration in their rapport with the community, it results in their withdrawal, both physically and emotionally, from their duties. This concern, coupled with the 72% rise in officers choosing to resign across England and Wales in 2022, suggests possible connections between the departure of officers and a decrease in public trust. (Hamilton and Black, 2021). The purpose of this research is to also identify any potential links and further impacts that the news and media may have on officers currently within their role.

1.3 Objectives

The primary aim of this dissertation is to investigate and thoroughly evaluate how news media shapes public perceptions regarding policing. Additionally, it seeks to understand the repercussions of these perceptions on the behaviour and experiences of individual police officers. By analysing various media portrayals and

their impact on societal views, this research will provide insights into the complex relationship between media representation and British Policing.

1. To investigate and analyse existing research and material that highlights and defines clear impacts of negative news and media stories in direct relation to UK Policing.
2. To construct specific and suitable methods and tools to investigate the papers question, by targeting the British Public with relevant material on the topic of public perception.
3. To choose suitable methods for investigating current and retired police officers on how they feel they are perceived and what affects this has on them and their duties through lines of specific questioning.
4. To analyse and interpret the data gained to understand any positive or negative correlation between the news and media and its impact on public perception and further on the UK Police officers themselves.
5. To draw conclusions and provide recommendations on the relationships and highlight the negative correlations between the news and media and the influence over public confidence and the direct impact on the UK Police Officers

1.4 Research Structure

The initial chapter has set the stage for the study by providing context, outlining the justification for the research, its objectives, and various aims.

The second chapter will feature a literature review that focuses on the current levels of public trust in law enforcement, the effects of misconduct on public perception, the influence of negativity bias on public views, the role of negative media in shaping perceptions of police, and the repercussions this has on individual police officers.

In the third chapter, the methods and methodologies will be detailed to determine the appropriate primary research techniques for this investigation. This aims to address the existing research gaps and facilitate data analysis.

Chapter four will analyse the primary data collected using the methodologies described in chapter three. The results will be presented through the application of statistical analyses.

The fifth chapter will concentrate on assessing and evaluating the objectives and aims of the research. Additionally, there will be a discussion regarding the key findings, recommendations, and limitations of the study.

1.5 Conclusion

This initial chapter has effectively outlined the context related to the research subject concerning the influence of news and media on the public's view of British Policing, as well as the implications for UK Police Officers. It has also delineated the primary aim and objectives of the project, highlighting the necessity for further investigation into this matter through this independent study. As previously noted, the subsequent chapter will conduct a critical analysis of the existing academic literature in this field.

Chapter 2

2.1 Literature Review

In April 1982, a year following the Brixton riots, a conference took place at the University of Leicester to examine Lord Scarman's assessments and recommendations. The conventional policing system in this nation is deeply rooted in the principle of policing by consent. As first introduced in 1829 in part to Robert Peel's 9 Principles (Jones, 2017), rather than through coercion: police forces are not an extension of the state but rather servants of the community, whose trust they must earn. Achieving this goal relies on police officers comprehending the fears and concerns of all community groups, including ethnic minorities, and taking the necessary actions to ensure that all citizens can conduct their lawful activities. (Oxford, 1984)

This is the cornerstone of British Policing and without the traditional consent of the public that the police serve the system breaks down. Discord takes place and lack of confidence and mistrust takes hold. This in turn as studies have shown result in a despondent and underperforming police force.

2.2 Public trust and confidence in the police

Trust and confidence in law enforcement have diminished in recent years, largely due to notable instances of misconduct and criminal behaviour. According to a YouGov survey conducted in October 2024, 52% of adults in Great Britain expressed that they had little to no confidence in the police's ability to address local crime, a significant increase from 39% in October 2019 (YouGov, 2024).

There are different definitions of the terms 'trust' and 'confidence' as they relate to the police, alongside the broader notion of 'legitimacy'. In a UK Parliament post, trust in the police is characterized as the belief in the police's ability to act fairly and effectively during encounters. This trust extends to individual officers as well as the police organisation as a whole. Individuals are more inclined to trust the police when they hold positive assessments and anticipations regarding the fairness, effectiveness, and integrity of the police. Conversely, confidence in the police signifies a generalized endorsement of the police, reflecting the extent to which trust is consistently demonstrated to be justified. (Hobbs and Brown, 2023)

The Institute for Government has indicated a potential link between the rise in reported instances of misconduct and criminal activities by police officers and a decrease in public confidence in law enforcement. This correlation is especially apparent in notable cases, such as that of Sarah Everard, who was kidnapped, sexually assaulted, and killed by an active Metropolitan Police Service officer, Wayne Couzens, in March 2021 (Rainbow, 2021). In a similar situation involving MPS officer David Carrick, who received 36 life sentences in February 2023 after admitting guilt to 49 charges, which encompass 24 counts of rape, has significantly diminished public trust in the police forces. This decline in public confidence is evident in the

protests that occurred prior to the sentencing of both Couzens and Carrick. On September 29, 2021, a feminist organization known as Sister Uncut staged a protest outside the courthouse where Couzens was scheduled to receive his sentencing. They held signs that read, "Abolish the Police" and "Met Police, Blood on your hands." (Kilby, 2024)

2.3 News and The Media

What is media? GDNET Research communications defines media by the roles they play in society. The roles that media plays in society are complex and varied. It serves as a source of education, disseminating knowledge and information while also providing entertainment through various formats such as news articles, feature stories, and in-depth analyses. Furthermore, media organizations produce a wide range of content, including documentaries, dramatic series, current affairs programs, public service announcements, and magazine shows, catering to both radio and television audiences. In this capacity, the media functions as a vital conduit for bringing a multitude of voices, perspectives, and experiences into the public sphere, enriching the collective discourse and fostering a more informed society. (GDNET, 2011).

GDNET suggest that the media plays an essential role in promoting social change and influencing public opinion and attitudes. The media, through its coverage, can highlight significant events that affect individuals' lives both adversely and positively, while also bringing attention to often overlooked issues and marginalized voices. The

media's agenda-setting function frequently shapes discussions, perceptions, and priorities within society.

To capture the attention of viewers and readers, news organizations leverage the negativity bias, given that contemporary news is accessible around the clock and earns income through subscription fees and advertisements (Conscious Vibe, 2022). This bias stems from the human inclination to prioritize negative events, objects, or personal characteristics (Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B, 2001), which equates for the overwhelming influx of negative news stories.

In the year 2023, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services published their yearly assessment known as 'State of Policing.' This comprehensive report evaluates the current state of policing across England and Wales. It highlighted notable shifts in key statistics, as revealed through extensive surveys and evaluations conducted by YouGov, indicating that significant changes were taking place within the policing landscape. From 6th January 2020 to 11th March 2024, the percentage of adults in Great Britain who believe that the police are performing well has decreased by 30%. Conversely, the percentage of adults who perceive the police as performing poorly has increased dramatically from 10% to an astonishing 50%. (HMICFRS, 2024)

In recent years, social media has increasingly become an essential tool for police forces. By actively engaging with the community and sharing important information, police officers can build trust and improve communication with the public. This interaction not only helps in disseminating crucial updates but also allows officers to address community concerns directly. However, the use of social media is not without its challenges. It can also lead to negative outcomes for police personnel,

such as facing harassment from individuals online or the spread of false information about police activities and policies. These issues highlight the dual-edged nature of social media as a resource for police forces. Social media remains very much a raw form for the sharing of news and events, it is not possible for forces to be able to vet and edit every single post made by the public. Unfortunately, in many instances posts relating to police forces will show what the owner wants it to show to fit their own agenda. (Denef, Bayerl, Kaptein, 2013)

In a psychology publication conducted by Kendra Cherry, MSED on 'What is the negativity bias?' via Verywell mind, The negativity bias refers to our inclination to not only perceive negative stimuli more easily but also to ruminate on these occurrences. Commonly referred to as positive-negative asymmetry, this bias indicates that the pain of criticism is felt more intensely than the pleasure derived from compliments. This psychological phenomenon elucidates why unfavorable first impressions can be challenging to surmount and why previous traumas can leave enduring impacts. In nearly every interaction, we tend to observe negative aspects more readily and subsequently recall them with greater clarity. When individuals form impressions of others, they often place a greater emphasis on negative information (Cherry, 2023). For instance, research indicates that when presented with both positive and negative adjectives to characterize another person's traits, participants tend to prioritize the negative descriptors in their initial assessment. (Hilbig, 2011)

As demonstrated in research articles such as ACL Anthology News Media use catching headlines known as clickbait to attract its traffic and views. In anticipation of generating a significant volume of clicks and possibly extensive social media shares, journalists from diverse news organizations often resort to sensationalist headlines on social platforms. Such headlines entice readers to engage with them, effectively

addressing the curiosity gap they experience. However, the low-quality content associated with clickbait results in wasted time and frustration for users. (Indurthi, Syed, Gupta and Varma, 2020). For instance, consider a title such as, Police officer praised for community work versus Ethnic minorities feel UK police are racially biased. The latter is expected to attract more views and clicks, based on the negativity bias that research indicates is the most probable outcome. Nevertheless, when examining the article concerning the minorities, the title is entirely deceptive. BBC News has employed a sensationalist headline accompanied by a sensationalist image, whereas the article predominantly discusses the disparity between diverse officers and the communities they serve, which contributes to the diminished trust different groups have in the officers, as they perceive them as unrelatable. (BBC News, 2020).

Research into the connections between media representations and public perceptions of policing has been a subject of investigation for many years. A study conducted in 2021 by Jaeyonh Choi sought to examine how positive, negative, and mixed portrayals of police in the media influence individuals' views on law enforcement (Jaeyong Choi, 2021). The data was collected from a cohort of undergraduate university students, predominantly from Criminology and Justice programs. The findings revealed that media portraying police in a positive light did not significantly alter the perceptions of policing among the sampled students. Additionally, the results suggested that individuals can influence their perceptions through media exposure, particularly highlighting that negative portrayals of police tend to enhance this effect. While the study delineates the relationship between negative media and perceptions of police, it is important to note that it is limited by issues related to sampling bias.

Sampling bias occurs when the samples collected from a stochastic variable are not chosen randomly, leading to a misrepresentation of the true distribution of that variable. This improper selection can arise from various non-random influences, which ultimately distort the results and conclusions drawn from the data. As a result, the findings may not accurately reflect the actual characteristics of the population being studied, making it crucial to ensure that sampling methods are designed to minimize such biases. A frequent source of sampling bias originates from the study's design, or the data collection methods employed, which may either promote or hinder the gathering of data from specific groups or individuals, or under particular circumstances. (Panzeri, Magri, Carraro, 2008)

The aforementioned study was carried out with a singular demographic, specifically students, which indicates that certain biases may exist since students generally belong to a similar socioecological class. Furthermore, the findings may not accurately reflect the sentiments or opinions of the broader public concerning various issues. Additionally, there exists a possibility of confirmation bias influencing the results, given that the research predominantly involves a substantial cohort of criminology students.

2.4 Influence on Police

A study carried out by the Journal of Criminal Justice looked at the Public perceptions of police misconduct and discrimination: Examining the impact of media consumption. The study highlights that The representation of policing in the media is contrasted with both favourable and unfavourable depictions. Consequently, a

multifaceted relationship is established between media consumption and societal perceptions of law enforcement. This research aimed to evaluate the influence of media consumption on attitudes regarding police misconduct and discrimination. The results indicated that individuals who frequently consumed network news were more inclined to perceive police misconduct as a common occurrence. This trend was particularly pronounced among minority participants. Likewise, minority participants who regularly watched network news were more likely to believe that White individuals received superior treatment from law enforcement. Lastly, the results showed that those who often viewed police dramas were of the opinion that affluent individuals received preferential treatment from the police. In contrast, regular viewers of crime-solving programs believed that the wealthy did not enjoy such preferential treatment. (Dowler,Zawilski 2007)

The previously mentioned factors have shown a significant impact on police officers in the United Kingdom. A key consequence of this influence is seen in the area of recruitment. A recent study conducted by Ashleigh Wojslawowicz, titled "Gauging the Impact of Negative Media Publicity on Career Decisions: Exploring Police Recruit Motivations During a Recruitment Crisis," was published in 2023. The findings revealed clear evidence that negative media coverage has adversely affected both recruitment and career progression within the police force. Officers are increasingly confronted with potential backlash and difficulties stemming from a British public that has grown disillusioned with law enforcement. Furthermore, the study indicated that officers are becoming more hesitant to engage in proactive policing due to the pressures exerted by media scrutiny. The results suggest that those officers who are more acutely aware of negative media portrayals are more inclined to think that police are less likely to independently initiate stops. (Wojslawowicz, 2023).

This situation raises a considerable issue, as a decrease in proactive policing could result in a rise in gateway crimes that are not being tackled at their source. These gateway crimes often serve as precursors to more serious offenses, and if they go unaddressed, they can escalate into larger problems for the community.

Furthermore, proactive policing plays a crucial role in building trust between law enforcement and the community. When this trust is absent, the chances of cultivating public confidence in the police force are significantly reduced, which can lead to a cycle of distrust and increased crime rates. (Nix, Wolfe, 2015)

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has effectively achieved its goal by analysing academic literature related to public perceptions of the UK police and the subsequent effects on community policing. The literature reveals that notable instances of severe misconduct and criminal activities among officers have negatively impacted community trust in the police force. Furthermore, it has shown that recruitment and career advancement within the police have suffered significant setbacks. The data indicates that officers encounter challenges and obstacles in performing their daily responsibilities due to concerns about public opinion and potential backlash. As a result, the erosion of public confidence threatens the foundational principle of policing by consent, which is essential to law enforcement in the UK.

The subsequent chapter of this dissertation aims to determine the methodology that is most fitting and appropriate for conducting primary research regarding the identified gaps observed in the literature review.

Chapter 3

3.1 Research Methodology

The previous chapter of this dissertation explores the current public perception and trust in the officers serving the community, as well as the effects this has on the police officers themselves. This analysis was conducted through a review of relevant literature on the subject.

This segment of the dissertation aims to analyse the methodology that I will employ, identifying the most suitable research methodology required for the collection and analysis of data pertinent to the dissertation's subject: What impact does the media have on the public's perception of British Policing, and what effect does that have on officers? This will be executed by means of two web surveys. The first will be targeted towards the UK public and the second towards serving and retired UK officers. In recent years, the adoption of online and mobile research techniques, such as online surveys, has experienced a significant increase. Due to advancements in technology, it is now possible to conduct research at a considerably reduced cost and within a shorter timeframe. This development facilitates data collection more efficiently than ever before, benefiting all stakeholders involved. Online surveys consist of questionnaires—typically fillable forms that are completed via the internet—designed to collect feedback from a specified target audience. These surveys can differ in both length and format, and they may include various types of questions, such as multiple-choice, ordinal scale, short answer, and others. Advantages of web based surveys are: Increased response rate, Low Cost, Real-time access, easy accessibility and convenience. However there are

disadvantages too. Such as Survey Fraud, Easy to miss or dismiss, limited sampling, response bias, no interviewer. (Salvatori, 2023). A research article published in sage journals in 2021 discusses Response and perception bias for online surveys. The text also addresses the topic of internet accessibility; however, as of 2023, this concern has become less significant. According to a census conducted in the United Kingdom in 2021, it was reported that 92% of adults were internet users, with 99% of individuals aged 16 to 44 being recent users of the internet (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Additionally, there are apprehensions regarding errors or biases in web surveys, as highlighted by Lee, S in 2006. These apprehensions pertain to the possibility of selection errors or discrepancies between the survey population, which comprises internet users, and the individuals who are recruited for the panel and selected to participate in the specific survey (Lee, S, 2006). There are both current and potential challenges that emerge from conducting web-based surveys; however, these challenges are overshadowed by the significant opportunities for extensive data collection and the cost-effectiveness ultimately provided by web-based surveys.

3.2 Research Approach – Research Onion

The research onion model was introduced by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill in their publication entitled Research Methods for Business Students in 2007. This model seeks to elucidate the various phases of dissertation writing, assisting students in formulating a more structured methodology. The following Research Onion model symbolically represents the methods through which the various components involved in the research can be analysed to formulate the ultimate research design. (Assadpour, Ghalehnoee and Bahramian, 2023)

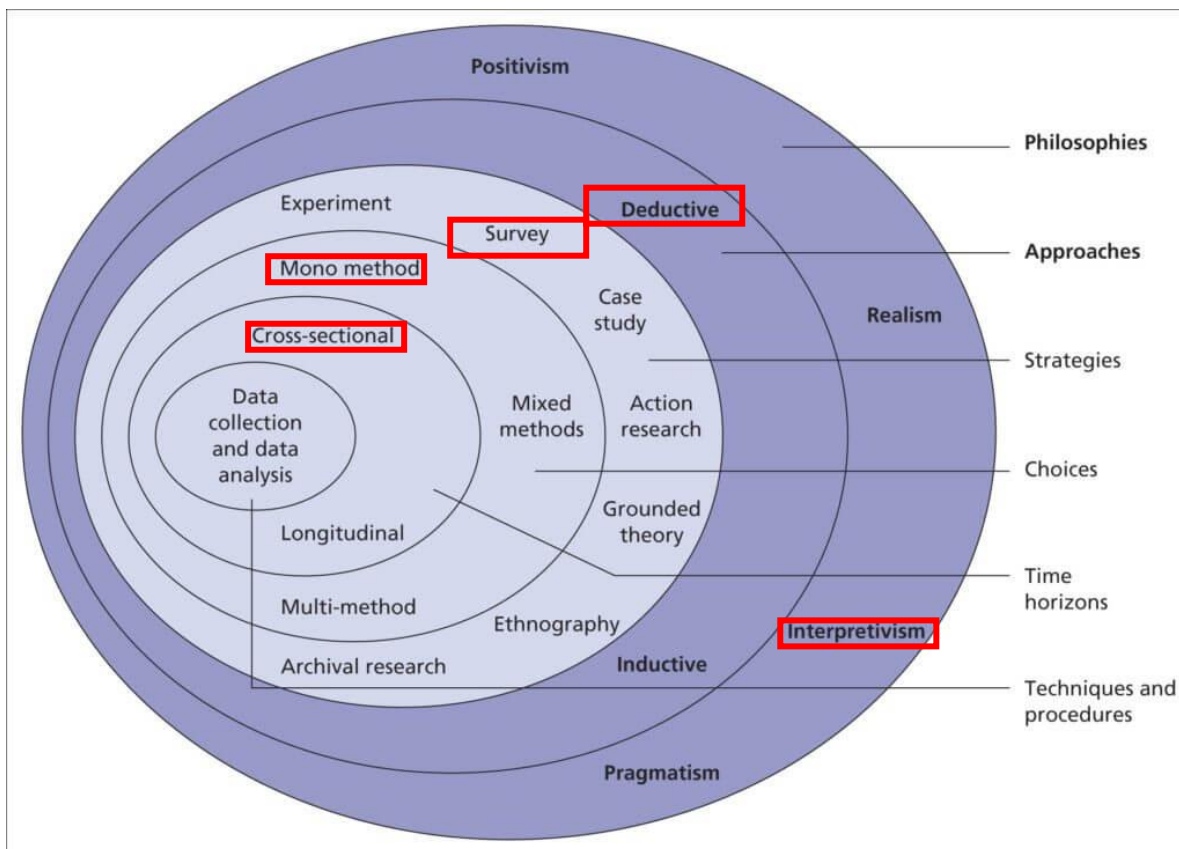


Figure 3.2 - Annotated Diagram - The Research Onion (Source: Assadpour, Ghalehnoee and Bahramian, 2023)

This diagram represents the Research Onion, a model created by Saunders in 2007. The diagram above illustrates the methodology that will be employed in this dissertation, with each research method indicated within a red box.

3.3 Research Philosophy

This pertains to the collection of principles that shape the worldview or perspective from which research is undertaken. Typically, it is examined through the lenses of

ontology and epistemology. In this context, ontology pertains to the authenticity of information and the comprehension of its existence, while epistemology relates to the credible information necessary for research and the methods through which it can be acquired. Philosophical frameworks employed in academic research are frequently categorized into positivism and interpretivism. Positivism posits that knowledge exists independently of the subject under investigation, whereas interpretivism asserts that individual observers possess their own interpretations and understandings of reality. (Potrac, Jones and Nelson, 2014)

This study has been carried out utilizing an interpretivist approach. Interpretivist research employs quantitative methods to collect data from large samples, with surveys being a common method for obtaining quantitative information. The relevant data is gathered through the use of surveys and questionnaires.

3.4 Research Approach

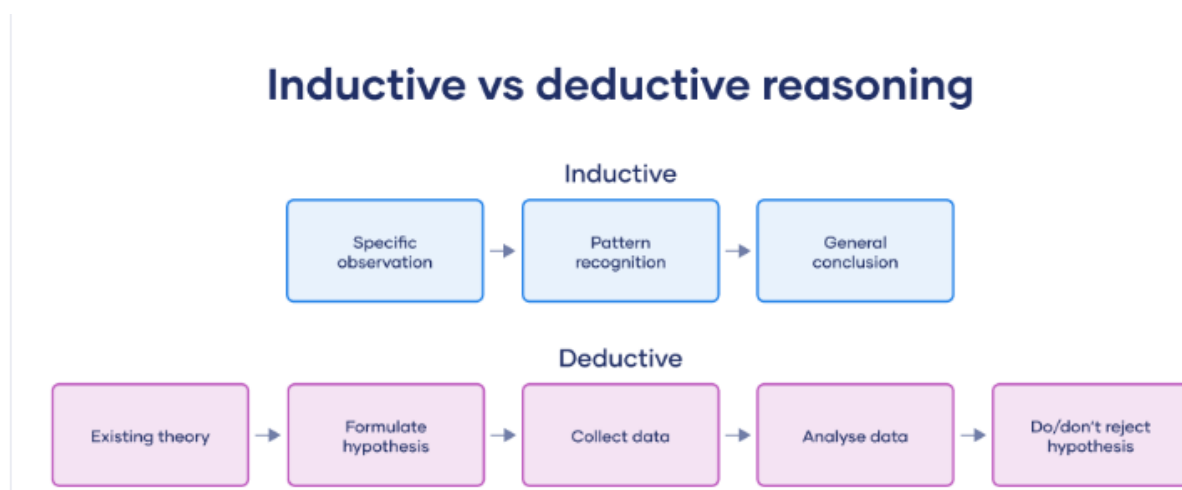


Figure 3.4 - Deductive and Inductive Approaches to the Relationship Between Theory and Research (Bryman, 2016)

Figure 3.1, sourced from the work of (Assadpour, Ghalehnoee, and Bahramian 2023), illustrates the concept of Saunders' research onion, which highlights two main categories of 'Research Approaches' that are commonly employed in academic writing. According to Bryman's social research methods, there are clear and essential differences between the two research approaches known as deductive and inductive. These differences are further detailed in Figure 3.4, which presents the Deductive and Inductive Approaches to the Relationship Between Theory and Research, as outlined by (Bryman 2016).

This dissertation will be utilising the deductive approach which takes the existing theory and formulates the hypothesis further. The data capture by means of survey can then be analysed and the final conclusion for the hypothesis can be drawn and constructed from there.

3.5 Research Strategy and choice

At the outset, the research strategy for this project was formulated to utilize a Mixed Method approach, which aimed to integrate both survey and interview techniques for a comprehensive analysis. However, unforeseen challenges have necessitated a shift in this strategy. As a result, the research will now be defined as a Mono-Method approach, concentrating mainly on gathering expert data through qualitative surveys. This change reflects a more streamlined focus on qualitative insights, allowing for a deeper understanding of the subject matter despite the initial broader scope.

Conducting surveys among a varied demographic that includes both the general public and current as well as retired police officers allows for the collection of valuable insights from multiple perspectives. This diversity in viewpoints significantly

enriches the research project, particularly when it comes to analyzing the results and forming conclusions. Furthermore, the survey participants represent a broad spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds, which means that the research can tap into a wide array of experiences. This variety enhances the project's capacity to uncover different perspectives and insights. Engaging with both law enforcement personnel and the wider community highlights the importance of adopting an interpretive philosophical approach to research, as it fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities involved. (Ojebode, Ojebuyi, Oladapo and Oyedele, 2018).

3.6 Time and Horizon

The second to last phase of the research onion is known as the Time Horizon, which pertains to the temporal scope of the research. Typically, observations can be categorized into two types based on their time horizons: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Cross-sectional data is utilized when all observations pertain to a single moment in time, as is common in many surveys. Conversely, longitudinal data indicates that observations for a specific variable are collected over multiple years, quarters, months, or days. (Alturki, 2021)

Given the limited scope of this study, a "Cross-sectional" time horizon is deemed the most suitable, as it also allows for the possibility of additional research in the future.

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

The main goal of this research is to collect and examine data related to how the public views the police in the UK, as well as how these perceptions impact policing

methods and the behavior of police officers. The questions developed for this study will focus specifically on this topic. Given the constraints of time and personal circumstances, the data collection process will be conducted through questionnaires that will be shared on various social media platforms. Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire that includes thirteen multiple-choice questions aimed at evaluating the public's perception of the police and the implications of these views on community policing efforts. For those interested, the questionnaire can be found in Appendices A through D of the dissertation. (*Sutton and Austin, 2015*).

Once the data has been gathered, it will be analyzed using software known as Google Forms, which will deconstruct each question into different charts for further examination of the findings. The collected data will provide an accurate representation of public perception regarding the UK police and its influence on policing and the community.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity serve as mechanisms for illustrating and conveying the rigor of research methodologies and the dependability of research outcomes. This dependability is contingent upon several characteristics of the research: the original research question, the methods of data collection including the timing and sources, the analytical processes employed, and the conclusions that are reached (*Roberts, Priest, 2006*).

Bryman also asserts that the reliability of a research endeavour is essential in determining whether the findings of a specific study can be replicated or if the study

itself is amenable to repetition. Furthermore, Bryman emphasizes that the validity of a project is critical in relation to the soundness of the conclusions drawn in a study. (Bryman, 2016)

3.9 Limitations

The limitations of this survey stem from its clearly defined timeframe. Due to a strict deadline for the submission of the dissertation, it is essential that the data collection process be completed within this period. Consequently, we are unable to determine if the responses to the survey had already peaked or if they were still on the rise. This uncertainty could have provided further insights, and a more comprehensive understanding of the data gathered.

An additional limitation of web surveys is the occurrence of response bias, which can significantly affect the validity of the results. This bias arises because certain demographic groups are often under-represented in the survey responses. This under-representation is primarily due to these groups having limited access to the Internet or not using the specific online platforms where the surveys are conducted. Furthermore, the process of recruiting participants for these surveys typically depends on self-selection, meaning that individuals choose to participate based on their own willingness and availability. This reliance on self-selection can lead to a situation where only certain types of individuals respond, further exacerbating the issue of under-coverage. As a result, both the under-representation of certain demographics and the self-selection of participants can lead to skewed estimates and potentially misleading conclusions from the survey data (*Bethlehem, 2010*).

3.10 Conclusion

This study is designed to gather two separate data sets for thorough analysis, which requires the distribution of two distinct web surveys across different locations. The first survey is aimed at the general public and will be distributed among Facebook users. This approach is based on research that suggests it is likely to generate the highest number of responses and achieve an optimal response rate. The second survey is specifically directed at police officers and will be posted on the PoliceUK subreddit, thereby enhancing the chances of user participation and engagement. After conducting extensive research, the decision was made to utilize a close-ended survey format that will take between five to ten minutes to complete. This structure is anticipated to enable the collection of substantial quantitative data for later review and analysis, as it is believed to provide the best potential response rates in online surveys, provided that previous research findings are accurate.

Chapter 4

4.1 Analysis

Chapter 3 provided an in-depth overview of the various methods and strategies utilized throughout this research project. In the following chapter, we will delve into the presentation and analysis of the data gathered from the primary investigation carried out by the researcher. To facilitate this research, two separate online surveys were created: one aimed at active and retired police officers, and the other focused on gathering insights from the general public.

Data was collected from 117 participants, consisting of 49 active police officers and 68 civilians, with each participant offering their perspectives on the influence of media on public perceptions of policing, as well as the potential effects on serving police officers. This chapter will refer to the information supplied by the participants.

Data analysis involves the examination, cleansing, transformation, and modelling of data to uncover valuable insights, formulate conclusions, and facilitate decision-making. The data was collected and analysed utilizing the Google Forms survey tool. Google Forms provide various advantages for data analysis. A significant advantage of the Google Forms platform is its ability to automatically generate findings into usable graphs, which effectively illustrate the data. (*Heeringa, West, Heeringa and Berglund, 2017*).

4.2 – Demographics

The public survey included 68 participants who were initially classified by gender to investigate the possibility of gender bias. Among the 68 participants, only 1 was below the age of 18. All participants voluntarily engaged in the survey, and every submission was anonymous, with no personal data retained. Both surveys utilized various platforms to broaden the data scope and enhance diversity. The public survey was shared on Facebook and Reddit within open forums. Conversely, the police survey was disseminated through the internal police intranet, Reddit, and police communication channels, including WhatsApp Groups exclusively for police personnel.

As seen in Figure 4.2 in the members of the public survey there was a large response by the male population, 85.3% Male vs 13.2% Female.

What is your gender?
68 responses

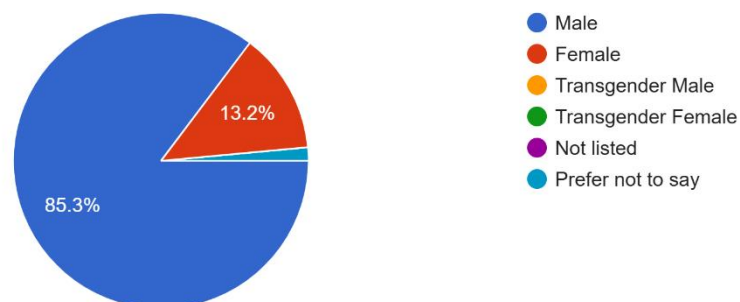


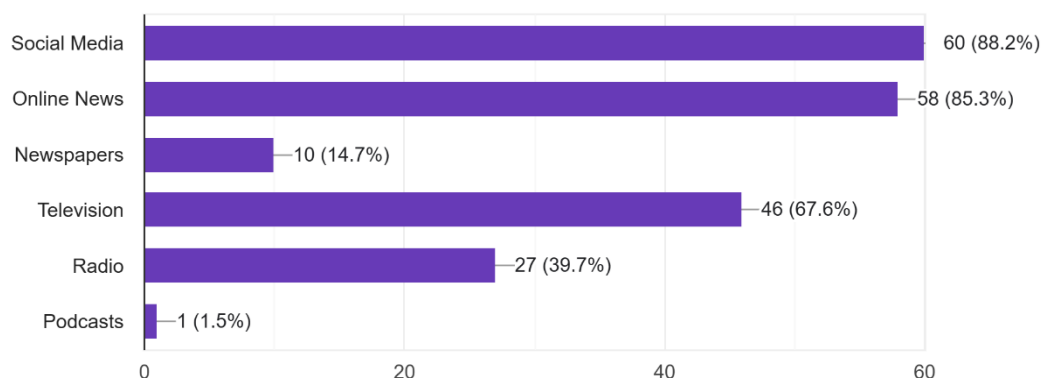
Figure 4.2- Public questionnaire, gender results

4.3 – Public Questionnaire Findings

After conducting an analysis of the 68 individuals who participated in the public questionnaire, it was found that a significant 60% of them regard social media as their primary platform for accessing news content. This is closely trailed by online news sources, which were identified as the main source of news for 58% of the participants.

This aligns closely with contemporary trends, as indicated by Ofcom's end-of-year report for 2024 titled 'News consumption in the UK: 2024'. In 2024, 71% of UK adults are obtaining news from online platforms, which is comparable to television consumption at 70%. Furthermore, social media plays a crucial role in online news consumption, with over half (52%) of UK individuals aged 16 and above now utilizing it as a news source. (Ofcom, 2024). The breakdown of all news consumption can be found in Figure 4.3.

What sources of media do you use
68 responses



The public survey aimed to identify the amount of positive news viewed in relation to the police within the last 6 months. The most common answers fell between

sometimes at 44.1% to never at 23.5%. Often 4th out of the 5 options with a merely 8.8%. The breakdown of all responses can be found below in Figure 4.31.

Alarming when we look at the results of the counter part question, In the last 6 months, how often have you seen negative news reports involving police or policing? Always was the highest scoring response with 39.7% closely followed by Often with 36.8%. The breakdown of all responses can be found below in Figure 4.32.

In the last 6 months, how often have you seen positive news reports involving police or policing?
68 responses

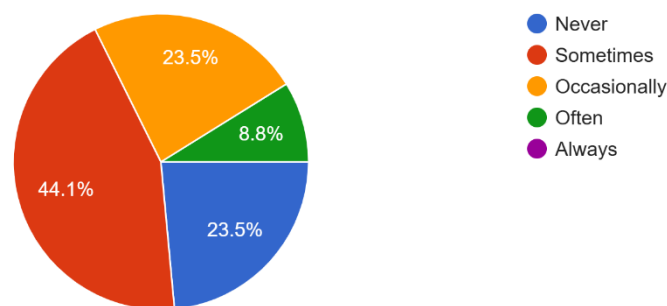


Figure 4.31 – Public positive news reports

In the last 6 months, how often have you seen negative news reports involving police or policing?
68 responses

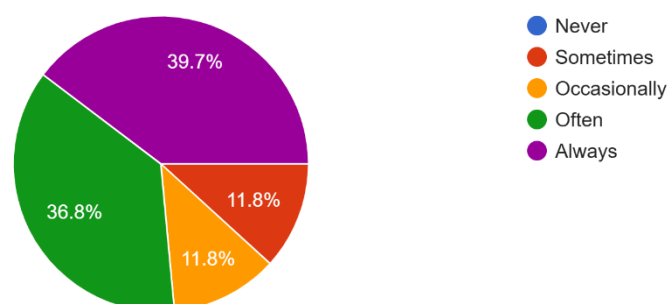


Figure 4.32 – Public negative news reports

Upon examining the responses of the 68 participants, the feedback regarding the influence of positive narratives was varied. When inquired whether they thought that positive stories enhanced their confidence in UK policing, 50% affirmed this belief, while 32.4% disagreed. In contrast, a related question that probed whether negative news stories would diminish public confidence revealed that 67.6% responded affirmatively, whereas 22.1% indicated otherwise.

As previously mentioned in the research, these findings may be associated with negativity bias. Studies indicate that adults frequently demonstrate a propensity for negativity bias, which leads them to concentrate on, internalize, and apply negative information more than positive information.

Do you feel positive news stories affect your confidence in policing?
68 responses

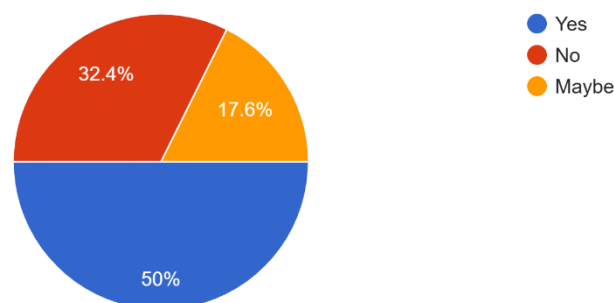


Figure 4.33 – Public positive news affect confidence

Do you feel negative news stories affect your confidence in policing?
68 responses

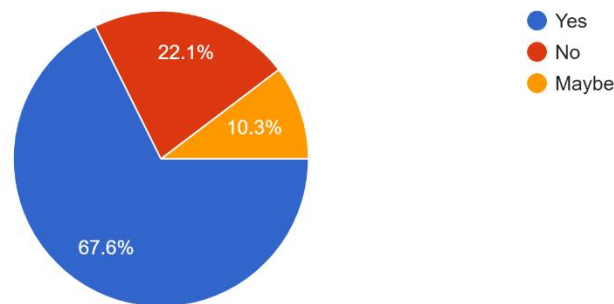


Figure 4.34 – Public negative news affect confidence

4.4 – Public perception and confidence in policing

Participants in the public survey were inquired about their current level of confidence in UK policing. Upon analysing the data, a nearly equal distribution emerged. The results, ranked from most to least votes, were as follows: 26.5% expressed being somewhat confident, 25% indicated slight confidence, 23.5% reported no confidence at all, and 22.1% stated they were confident. This data indicates that, in total, 70% of the respondent's exhibited confidence in UK policing as an institution.

How confident are you right now in UK policing?
68 responses

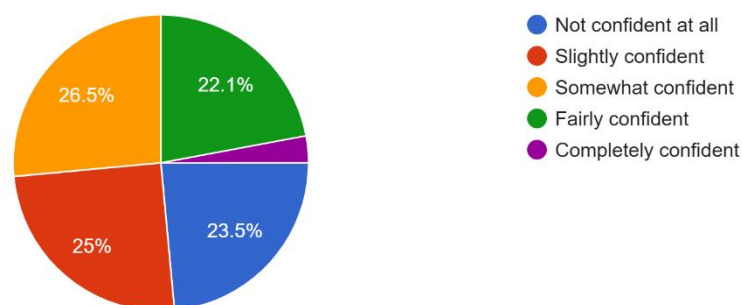


Figure 4.4 – Public confidence in UK policing

4.5 – Police Questionnaire Findings

The police questionnaire was directed towards both serving and retired officers, yielding a total of 49 responses, of which only one was from a retired officer. These officers were inquired about their duration of service. The predominant response category was the 0-3 years' service bracket, accounting for 40.8%, closely followed by those with 8+ years of service at 36.7%. This inquiry was essential, as a recent study by the Police Federation revealed that as of September 2023, 38% of police officers in the UK had less than 5 years of service (Police Federation, 2023). The data obtained from this study suggest that the actual percentage may exceed the estimated 38%, given that a significant majority of respondents fell within the 0-3 year experience range. The Police Federation's study raised concerns about inexperienced officers supervising their less experienced counterparts, which has become a point of worry for senior police officials. The findings of this survey indicate that the potential for such issues may be more pronounced than previously anticipated; however, due to the limited number of responses, it is challenging to assert this with certainty.

How many years have you been a Police Officer?
49 responses

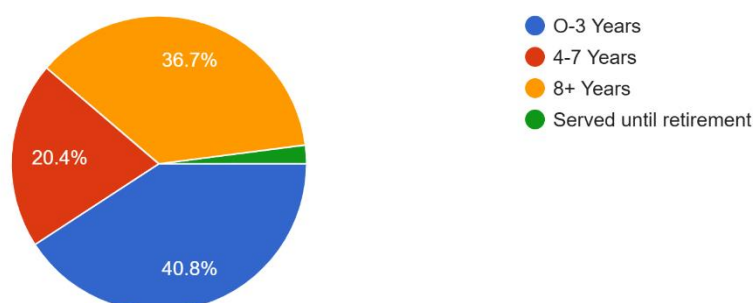


Figure 4.5 – Police Length of Service

4.6 – Impact on Police Officers

One of the objectives of the surveys was to ascertain whether there exists a correlation between negative news media and its influence on an individual officer's capacity to perform their duties. An analysis of the responses from 49 officers revealed that 81.6% affirmed that positive news influences public confidence. Conversely, when posed with the question of whether they believed negative news impacts public confidence in policing, an overwhelming 100% responded affirmatively.

Do you feel positive news stories affect the public's confidence in policing?
49 responses

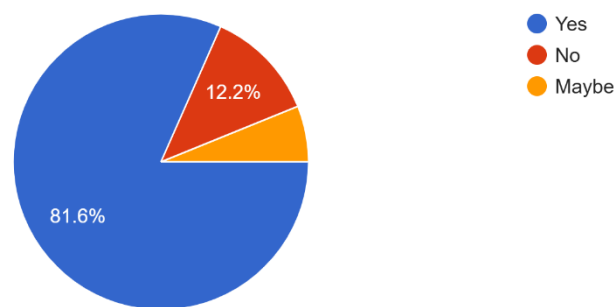


Figure 4.6 – Police asked about public confidence positive

Do you feel negative news stories affect the public's confidence in policing?
49 responses

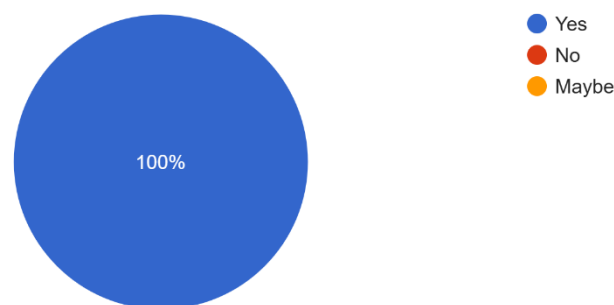


Figure 4.61 – Police asked about public confidence negative

The officers were posed three essential inquiries to ascertain the effects of public perception as influenced by the media:

How frequently have you encountered challenges or backlash in your profession due to negative media coverage? A significant 53.1% indicated sometimes, while 28.6% reported often as their experience.

What influence have media reports exerted on your capacity to fulfill your responsibilities and execute your duties? Once again, a substantial 59.2% indicated a negative impact, 26.5% stated there was no impact, whereas 10.2% described the impact as very negative.

Has public response to a news release ever rendered it challenging or impossible for you to perform your duties due to backlash? Ultimately, 49% of respondents affirmed that they encountered difficulties or impossibilities in carrying out their responsibilities, while 32.7% responded negatively.

4.7 – Conclusion

In summary, this study has revealed that police officers in the UK feel that the news media treats them unfavorably, with a predominant focus on negative narratives regarding their portrayal. The respondents indicated that these negative portrayals directly affect their roles within UK policing, presenting them with various challenges. Furthermore, the officers expressed the belief that positive media coverage could influence public attitudes, both positively and negatively, and significantly affect public confidence in policing. Nevertheless, the public survey suggested a potential divergence in perspectives between the two groups. Public survey participants

reported that positive stories had a considerably lesser effect on their confidence in the police compared to the perceptions held by police officers, although they concurred that negative stories did impact their confidence in law enforcement. It is important to consider the real-life context, as many public respondents noted having direct interactions with the police, which may have shaped their views on UK policing and their overall confidence in it.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Main Findings

Throughout the dissertation, numerous findings have been consistently noted across all sections. The research aimed to identify two primary aspects: the influence of media on public perception of policing and police officers, as well as the effect that this perception has on everyday policing. Despite the adverse effects of news media on the public's view of policing, overall public perception remains elevated. A significant portion of survey participants expressed confidence in UK policing, aligning with findings from earlier studies. Furthermore, the sentiment towards individual officers is notably positive, with most respondents indicating a favourable view of UK Police officers. Nevertheless, while a direct link between negative media coverage and public perception is evident, the overall perception of UK police continues to be high. This situation raises concerns that if the current pattern of negative media coverage persists, public perception of policing may decline over time, potentially damaging the relationship between the public and law enforcement. It is important to note, however, that these positive or negative perceptions of policing cannot solely be attributed to media influence, as the direct effects of crime or police-related incidents also play a significant role in shaping these opinions.

Conversely, officers are explicitly expressing that the news media exerts a direct and detrimental influence on their capacity to perform daily responsibilities, particularly during periods of unfavourable coverage. Officers believe that these adverse narratives significantly shape public perception. Research indicates that if the media were to leverage its influence by disseminating more positive stories and highlighting

the often-overlooked commendable actions that occur, a transformation would ensue in the way the public views and interacts with the police. The impact of negative news stories is evident in the challenges faced by officers, which complicate their everyday functions and overall policing duties. Furthermore, it is apparent that because of these negative media portrayals, police officers are encountering difficulties directly attributable to these narratives.

5.2 Recommendations

Throughout this study, numerous recommendations can be proposed. The influence of adverse narratives on law enforcement personnel is significant and poses daily challenges for these officers. Furthermore, there is substantial evidence indicating that such negative narratives affect the public's view of policing. By raising awareness of the issues addressed in this research, it holds the promise of improving engagement and acknowledgment of the existing problems, thus aiding in the creation of novel solutions moving forward. (Rice 2019)

A primary suggestion is for police officers to enhance their presence in the community through foot patrols. This strategy presents various advantages, as officers will have increased chances to connect with residents, thus establishing rapport and trust. Enhanced visibility can render police officers more relatable, making them appear more accessible and less like outsiders, which is crucial for cultivating a constructive relationship with the public.

A second suggestion pertains to the management of adverse media narratives related to policing. It is essential to provide direct training to police officers on the effects of negative media coverage and strategies for addressing inquiries about

these issues. Such training could mitigate the potential impact on the officers when they are faced with stories about which they possess limited or no information.

5.3 – Limitations

This dissertation aimed to explore the connections between negative news reports and their influence on public perception, as well as the subsequent effects on police officers. There are concerns regarding the sample size and its applicability on a national scale. With only 68 members of the public and 49 members of UK police forces surveyed, further research is necessary to generalize the findings to the wider population. The study utilised a convenience sampling method due to time constraints. To enable the generalisation of results to the larger population, it is essential to include a diverse array of participants.

A notable limitation of this research was the time constraint imposed for its completion, which limited the number of participants eligible for the survey. An extended timeframe would have facilitated a more thorough representation of the community's perspectives on police officers.

5.4 – Achievement of Objectives

The research conducted has completed the objectives set to itself:

1. To investigate and analyse existing research and material that highlights and defines clear impacts of negative news and media stories in direct relation to UK Policing.

2. To construct specific and suitable methods and tools to investigate the papers question, by targeting the British Public with relevant material on the topic of public perception.
3. To choose suitable methods for investigating current and retired police officers on how they feel they are perceived and what affects this has on them and their duties through lines of specific questioning.
4. To analyse and interpret the data gained to understand any positive or negative correlation between the news and media and its impact on public perception and further on the UK Police officers themselves.
5. To draw conclusions and provide recommendations on the relationships and highlight the negative correlations between the news and media and the influence over public confidence and the direct impact on the UK Police Officers

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Appendix

Appendix A – Public Questionnaire

Media and the Public Perception of Policing

This survey aims to highlight any links between the media and the public's perception of UK police officers

* Indicates required question

What is your gender? *

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Transgender Male

☐ Transgender Female

☐ Not listed

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other:

What is your age? *

☐ Under 18

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-34

☐ 35-44

☐ 45-54

☐ 55+

☐ Prefer not to say

What is your race or ethnicity? *

☐ Asian or Asian British

☐ Black, Black British, Caribbean or African

☐ Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

☐ White

☐ Other ethnic group

Do you have disabilities or impairments? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Section 2 of 4

Media Exposure

To identify sources and amount of media

What sources of media do you use? *

- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Online News
- ☐ Newspapers
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Other...

On average how many hours per week are you exposed to news media? *

- ☐ 0-1 hours
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ 3+ hours

After section 2 Continue to next section

Section 3 of 4

Media and Policing

to identify links between media and policing



...

In the last 6 months, how often have you seen positive news reports involving police or policing? *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

Do you feel positive news stories affect your confidence in policing? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Questions Responses 60 Settings

In the last 6 months, how often have you seen negative news reports involving police or policing? *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

...

Do you feel negative news stories affect your confidence in policing? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

How confident are you right now in UK policing? *

- ☐ Not confident at all
- ☐ Slightly confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Fairly confident
- ☐ Completely confident

Section 4 of 4

Personal Interaction with Policing



Description (optional)

Have you, a family member or close friend ever reported a crime / incident to the police? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How satisfied were you with the process / outcome? *

- ☐ Extremely Unsatisfied
- ☐ Unsatisfied
- ☐ Neautral
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Extremely Satisfied
- ☐ N/A

Have you ever had a direct interaction with police? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What is your perception of UK Policing and UK Police Officers *

- ☐ Very Poor
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Neautral
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Very Good

Appendix B – Police Questionnaire

Section 1 of 4

Media impact on public perception of UK policing and officers

B *I* U

Aims to identify any links between media and the public perception of UK policing and officers

Are you a current serving UK Police Officer? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Retired

How many years have you been a Police Officer? *

☐ 0-3 Years

☐ 4-7 Years

☐ 8+ Years

☐ Served until retirement

Questions Responses 49 Settings

What department did / do you work in? *

☐ Response

☐ Traffic

☐ Neighbourhood

☐ CID

☐ JFU

☐ Other...

After section 1 Continue to next section

Section 2 of 4

Media Exposure

To identify sources and amount of media

What source of media do you use? *

☐ Social Media

☐ Online News

☐ Newspapers

☐ Television

☐ Radio

On average how many hours per week are you exposed to news media? *

- ☐ 0-1 hours
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ 3+ hours

After section 2 Continue to next section

Section 3 of 4

Media and Policing

to identify links between media and policing

In the last 6 months, how often have you seen positive news reports involving police or policing? *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

Do you feel positive news stories affect the public's confidence in policing? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

In the last 6 months, how often have you seen negative news reports involving police or policing? *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

Do you feel negative news stories affect the public's confidence in policing? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Section 4 of 4

Impact for officers



aim to see what if any impact there is on officers

How often have you faced difficulty or backlash in your job on the back of negative media? *

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Frequently

what impact have media reports had on your ability to perform your role and carry out duty's? *

- ☐ Very Negative
- ☐ Negative
- ☐ No impact
- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Very positive

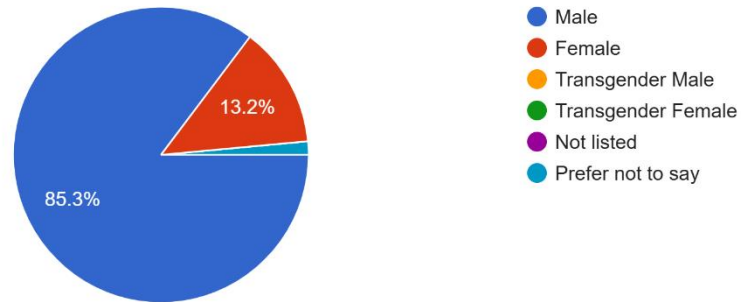
Has public reaction to a news release ever made it difficult / impossible to do your duty due to backlash? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Appendix C – Public Answers

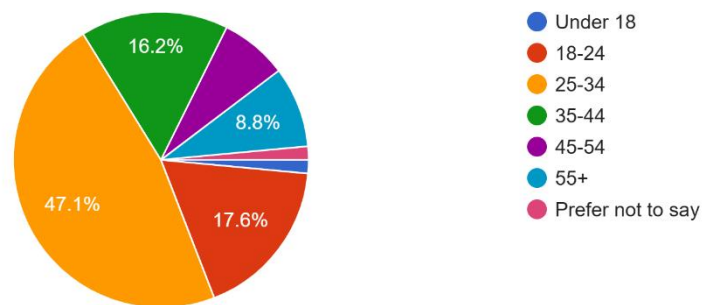
What is your gender?

68 responses



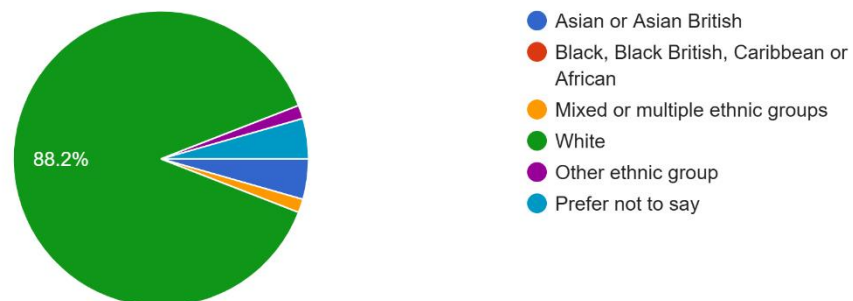
What is your age?

68 responses



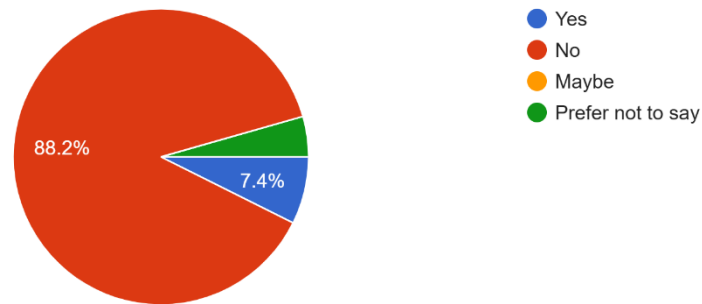
What is your race or ethnicity?

68 responses



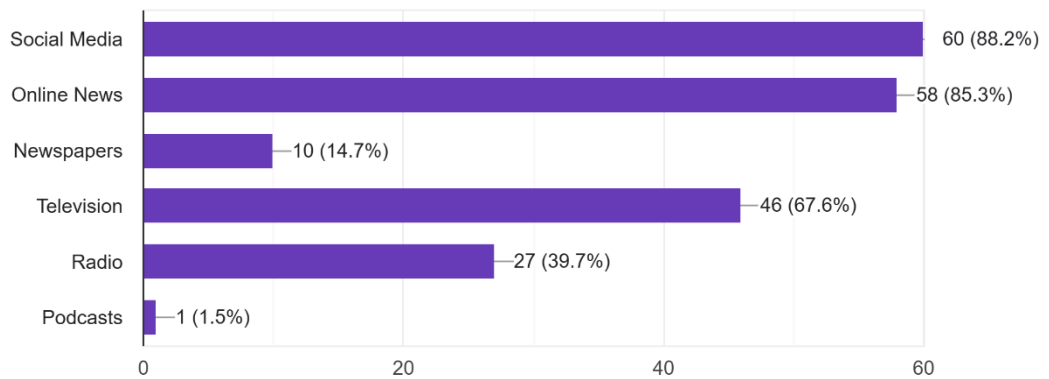
Do you have disabilities or impairments?

68 responses



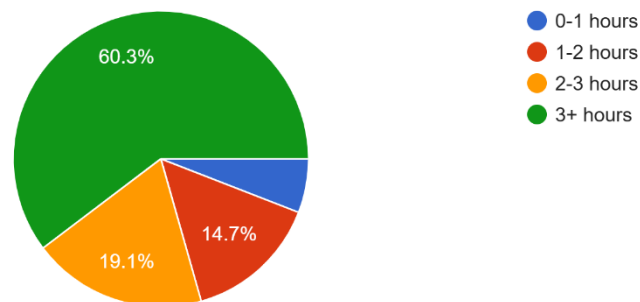
What sources of media do you use

68 responses

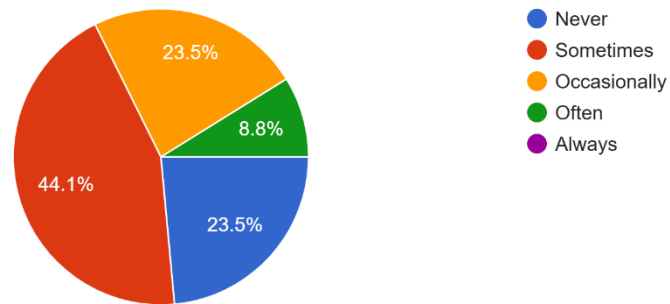


On average how many hours per week are you exposed to news media?

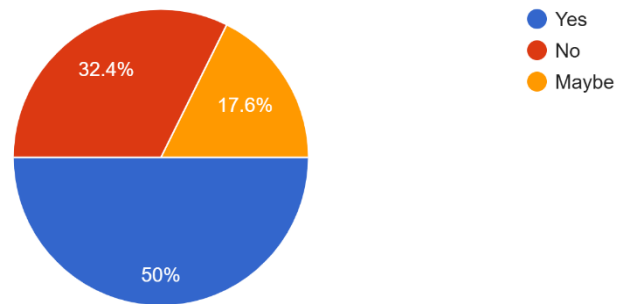
68 responses



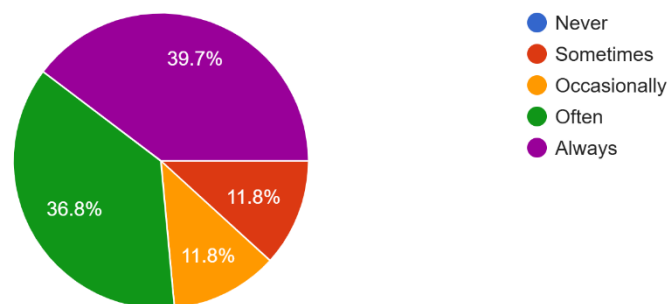
In the last 6 months, how often have you seen positive news reports involving police or policing?
68 responses



Do you feel positive news stories affect your confidence in policing?
68 responses

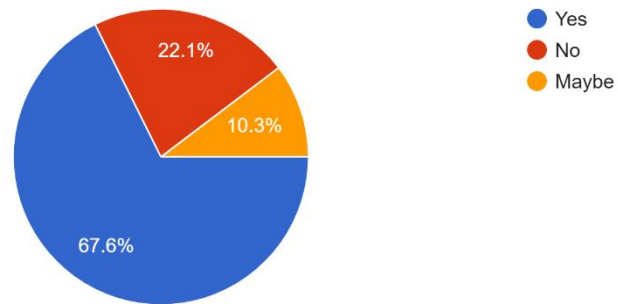


In the last 6 months, how often have you seen negative news reports involving police or policing?
68 responses



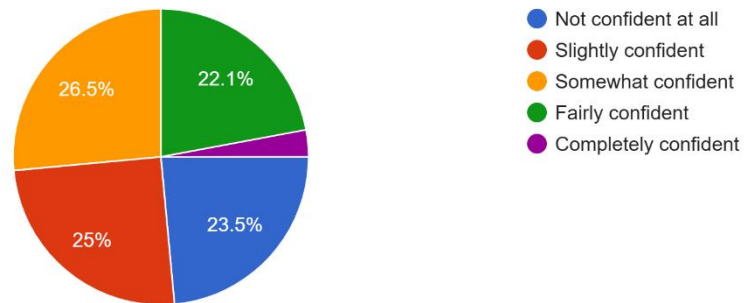
Do you feel negative news stories affect your confidence in policing?

68 responses



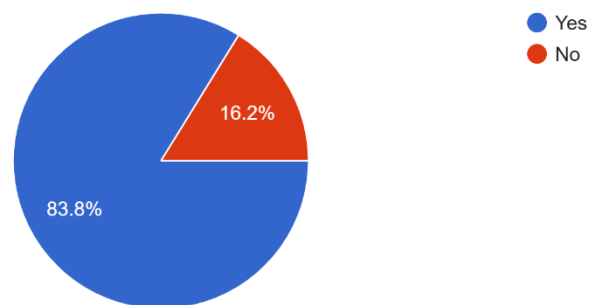
How confident are you right now in UK policing?

68 responses



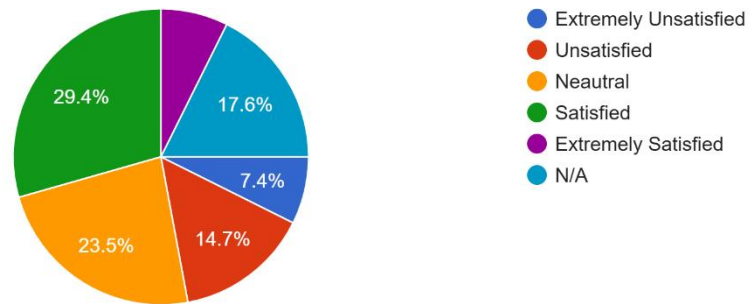
Have you, a family member or close friend ever reported a crime / incident to the police?

68 responses



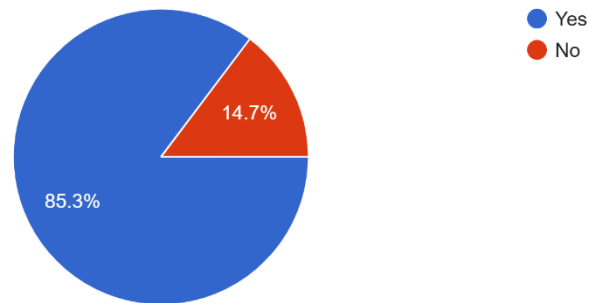
How satisfied were you with the process / outcome?

68 responses



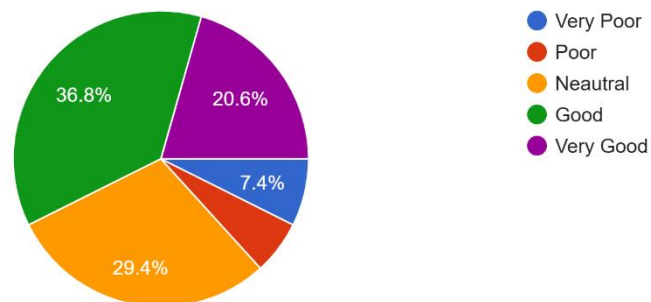
Have you ever had a direct interaction with police?

68 responses



What is your perception of UK Policing and UK Police Officers

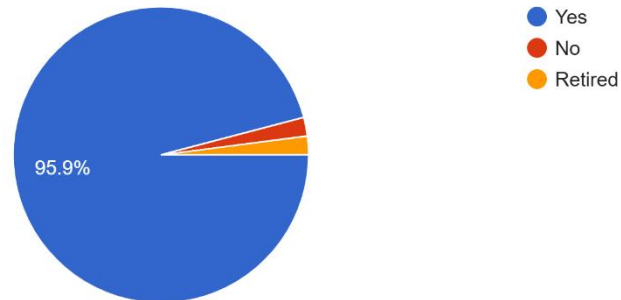
68 responses



Appendix D – Police Answers

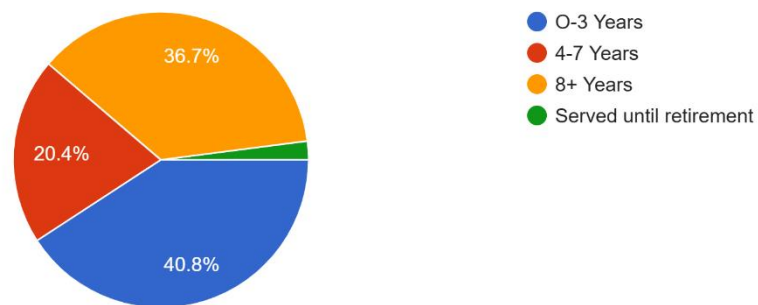
Are you a current serving UK Police Officer?

49 responses



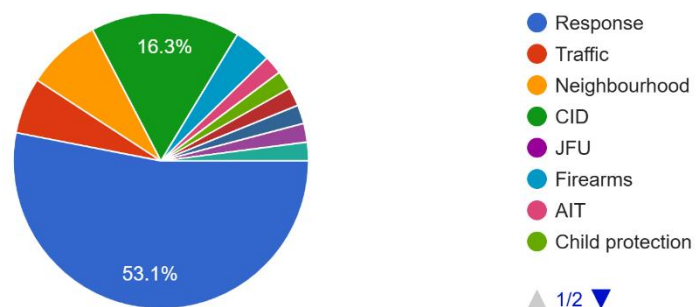
How many years have you been a Police Officer?

49 responses



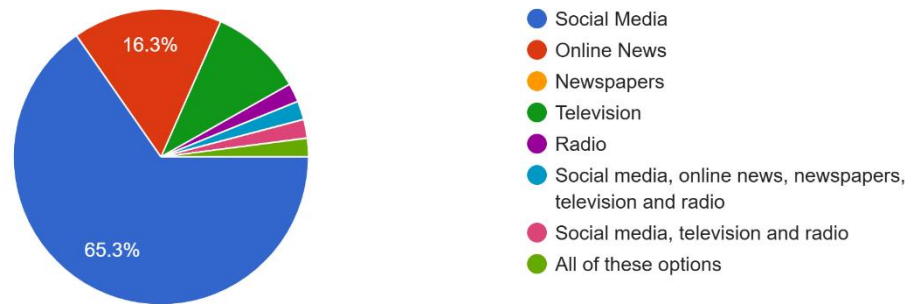
What department did / do you work in?

49 responses



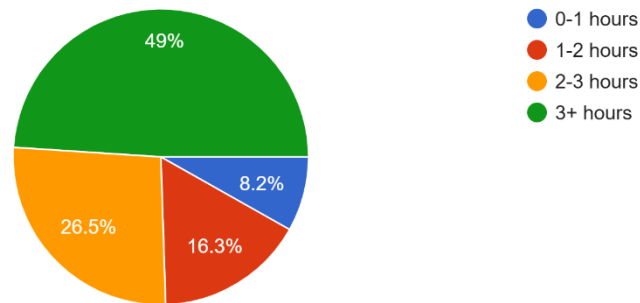
What source of media do you use?

49 responses



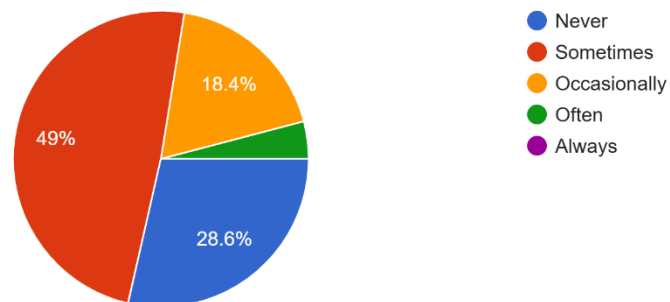
On average how many hours per week are you exposed to news media?

49 responses



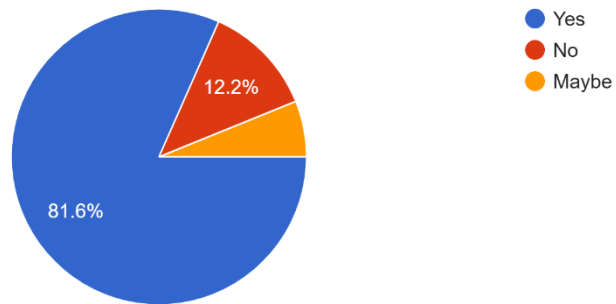
In the last 6 months, how often have you seen positive news reports involving police or policing?

49 responses



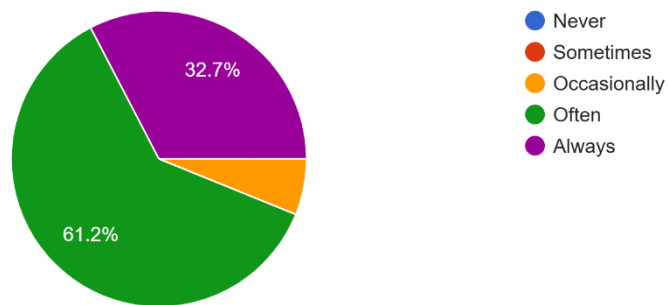
Do you feel positive news stories affect the public's confidence in policing?

49 responses



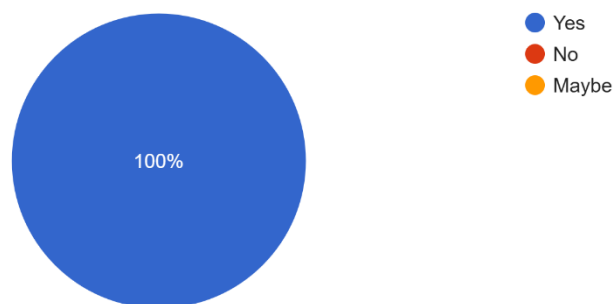
In the last 6 months, how often have you seen negative news reports involving police or policing?

49 responses



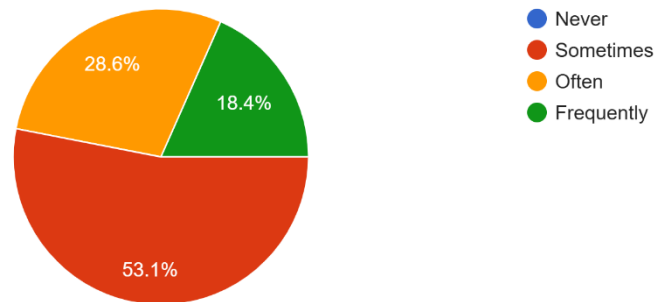
Do you feel negative news stories affect the public's confidence in policing?

49 responses



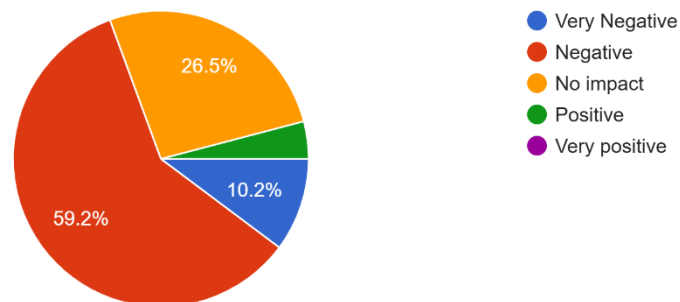
How often have you faced difficulty or backlash in your job on the back of negative media?

49 responses



what impact have media reports had on your ability to perform your role and carry out duty's?

49 responses



Has public reaction to a news release ever made it difficult / impossible to do your duty due to backlash?

49 responses

