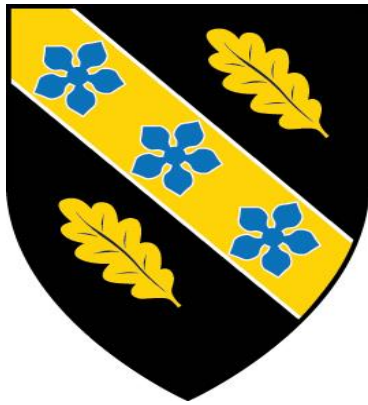




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UNIVERSITY OF WALES

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SWANSEA - ABERTAWE

**The study of the effects of carrying taser on the mindset of front-line police officers; pre, during and post incident.**

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**Student number**          1922399  
**Degree title**              BSc (Hons) Professional Policing Practice

**Acknowledgements:**

I'd like to take this opportunity to give my sincerest gratitude to my wife and children for their unwavering support throughout my three years of study. Without their guidance, support, and patience I would not have been able to complete my studies to this level.

I would also like to thank my parents for providing me with a solid and honest upbringing and for teaching me a sound set of morals and ethics. The lessons taught to me during my former years have given me the resources and abilities to become a professional police officer.

**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 14/03/23

#### STATEMENT 1

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

Signed: 

Date: 14/03/23

#### 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.

Signed: 

Date: 14/03/23

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I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for interlibrary loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Date: 14/03/23

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines and critically analyses current research into the effects of carrying a taser, and how this impacts the mindset of front-line police officers; pre, during and post incident.

The paper looks at the thoughts and feelings of front-line police officers when experiencing incidences of conflict within their daily duty. In doing so, the officer's thought processes will be examined as they progress through pre-attendance and during the incident stages.

The media coverage is also explored within the study to see if the portrayal of the taser and its reputation adds any influence on the way officers react. A questionnaire was sent to a range of police officers within Gwent police asking them about their interactions with taser and any resultant change in decision making or approach to the subject. The results gained, suggested that the training undertaken by officers adequately prepared them for occurrences of conflict and possibility of use of taser.

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## Chapter One

# Introduction

A police officer's daily duties can be varied and challenging, the latter frequently being declared a positive side of the job by a large percentage of officers (University of Southampton, 2023).

Police officers frequently find themselves in situations of conflict from members of the public and are expected to confront and deal with this in an appropriate and professional manner to maintain public order and uphold the Law. This is often reported negatively by the media, fuelling negative public opinion towards the police.

As a species, humans are naturally cautious when confronted with conflict and challenging behaviours; a concept thought to date back to prehistoric cave dweller times (Nicholson, 1998). In addition, learnt behaviours from personal experiences and genetic makeup contribute to this cautious response (Nicholson, 1998). However excess caution can often lead to further conflict and criminality.

Recent findings by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) documented 41,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales with year ending March 2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2022). These statistics have raised the call for more front-line officers to carry 'Taser' to protect themselves and the community, with 71% of those surveyed, supporting the routine arming of police with 'Taser' (Police Federation England and Wales, 2016). This study will examine the thought processes of police officers when confronted by an incident involving conflict. The investigation will look at how the carrying of a 'Tom A. Swift Electric Rifle' (Plouffe, 2019) or 'Taser' as it is more commonly known has on these thought processes and whether any sub-conscious influences may impact upon the decision making of officers when this device. In doing so, the researcher will consider the following questions:

1. Do serving officers feel there is a necessity to carry Taser in their role?
2. Does the media's portrayal of taser have an impact on the officer's use of Taser.
3. Does the carrying of Taser influence the officer's mindset pre, during and post incident?

In investigating the above, the researcher aims to determine if the accompaniment of Taser affects an officer's attitude or approach to a subject or incident involving conflict. In doing so, this study will attempt to develop an understanding of the effects of Taser, and if it may influence an officer's mindset to a positive or negative response, one that contradicts their original conflict response training, and contribute to anti-police attitude by media outlets and the relentless calls from pockets of society to de-fund police forces across the United Kingdom (UK) (West, 2020).

## Chapter Two

# Literature Review

## 2.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide a brief exploration of officer's perspective on carrying taser. It will address each of the research objectives by studying the available literature on the topic. The chapter will look at three key objectives which have an influence on the thought processes of officers whilst carrying taser. The research will conclude with a section on the mental health effects on front line officers who have taser.

## 2.1 Arguments

The introduction of Taser or Conducted Energy Device (C.E.D) into front line policing in 2004 in England and Wales was one of contention and controversy (Bleetman, Steyn and Lee, 2004), and has continued to be a focus of discussion.

Described as a 'less lethal' option by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC, 2015) when dealing with issues such as offenders with weapons or threat to life situations, its safety has been questioned internationally (Amnesty International UK, 2008). An investigation by Reuters in the United States of America (USA) between 2000 and 2017, reviewed over 1000 cases of police taser use, which identified that 150 people died after being tasered. The report concluded that taser was a leading cause or significant contributor to the death of 15% of the subjects (Reuters, 2017).

In contrast, Bozeman, Teacher, and James of Wake Forest Baptist Medical Centre found in their 2012 study examining almost 1000 recipients of taser use, that 99.7% of subjects suffered no injuries with only 3 subjects required hospital treatment. This suggests Taser to be a safer, less lethal option which contradicts public perception (Kaminski, 2008). However, the study made no reference to the participant demography and did not expand on the treatment required to the 3 subjects who required hospital treatment.

## 2.2 To investigate if serving officers feel there is a necessity to carry taser in their role

In 2019, a survey was conducted by the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) in association with the broadcaster LBC regarding the issue of tasers to front-line officers. Of the 7000 officers studied, 89% were happy to carry taser as part of their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and would wish to continue following appropriate training. The same research showed a huge 97% also felt their colleagues should also be afforded the option of carrying the device (Police Federation, 2019).

A poll conducted at the same time by broadcaster LBC into the public's feeling on officers carrying taser found 73% of 2000 people felt it was a good idea, further citing it necessary for front line police officers to routinely carry taser (Police Federation, 2019). This corroborates with research conducted by the PFEW in 2016, to identify the outcome of a unanimous vote the year before by the same organisation in favour of a large roll out of taser. Whilst the survey details its 2004 participants had an age range of 16-75, it does not specify their demographics. As only 14% of respondents said they had access to taser and 43% said they would like to have access to the device, it is difficult to determine the equality of operational experiences of these officers, their degrees of conflict and crime exposure or their geographical position to receive a representative conclusion.

In November 2016, the PFEW commissioned another survey, conducted by Ipsos Mori, which showed 71% of the public considered it appropriate for officers to carry taser when on duty. Ninety-seven per cent of those surveyed said they knew what a taser was, with 4 out of 5 saying it would make no difference on their decision to approach an officer if they required assistance. The study also found only 17% of the public thought officers should be given a choice to carry taser or not.

A further survey of PFEW members in January 2017 showed an increase in opinion to the issue of taser to officers, amounting to an 8% increase above results from its 2014 poll. The 2017 survey indicated that member response had increased to 82% of members responding, citing there should be more tasers issued to officers. Officers in particular roles should be taser authorised such as 86% in neighbourhood officers and 82% in front line response officers (PFEW, 2022).

In an interview with the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), John Apter, the National Chair of the Police Federation said that officers feel,

**“...vulnerable and often isolated due to the lack of vital protective equipment.” “Ultimately, having a taser gives them the capability to defend not only themselves but also the public they want to protect”**

**(BBC, 2019).**

A large rise in violence against police officers during the late 2010's led to an emergency meeting being called by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) on the safety of Officers and their PPE (NPCC, 2019). The trend for assaulting emergency workers, including police officers, continued to rise into the early 2020's with a 14% increase in assaults on response officers in February 2021 compared to February 2020 (Jacques, 2021). Clearly, there is a difference between police and public views regarding the need for better equipment, both in terms of personal protective equipment and in actual numbers, according to a report analysing police views (Morin et al., 2017).

Ipsos Mori and Pew (2016) in the USA, conducted two separate surveys using identical wording and phrasing to achieve a clear contrast of opinion between police officers and other public employees respectively, relating to personal safety during working hours. This online survey of 7917 police officers during May and August 2016 preceded a second survey of 4538 adults between August and September of the same year. Results indicated that 84% of officers felt “nearly always” to having serious concerns compared to 33% of the public in other forms of employment. However, the study did not detail the roles that the officers carried out during their working week. The study also did not specify the level of crime within the area they worked. Therefore, one can conclude that these results are mis-leading, because it is unclear if the officers worked in high crime areas or more affluent lesser crime areas. It was not clear in the results or demography whether officers felt carrying taser was necessary to do their duty. On studying the texts, it is unclear how the participants were recruited to the surveys; so, it is not possible to rule out bias. In addition, there does not appear to be any meaningful reasoning or discussion to the results. Instead, these surveys (Ipsos Mori and Pew, 2022) seem to have only sought generalised points by means of quantitative questions, which given the lack of demographic and subject recruitment information, provides only vague information; demonstrating a distinct gap in identifying if officers deem taser necessary for the duties they carry out. Alchemer (2016) suggested that using a qualitative design would provide greater depth and detail to the findings, which in this case could have been more advantageous to supporting the outcomes.

## **2.3 To explore if the media’s portrayal of taser is having an impact on officer use of taser**

The media has huge influence on the British public, playing a pivotal role in steering opinion to whichever direction it chooses. The tabloid press often gives a cynical view of politics and politicians, frequently focusing on scandals with allegations of failure and incompetence (Rocket, 2019).

Before the invention of social media, the British public would acquire information initially through word of mouth and then later through the mainstream media (Subramanian, 2018). The advent of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has resulted in information originating from unreliable tabloid press sheets or television broadcasters (Martin, 2018), being rapidly distributed to huge audiences along a chain of multimedia devices in the blink of an eye, (Panke, 2019; McCombs and Al, 2011).

An example of how powerful the media can be in driving consumer news is demonstrated in a poll conducted via Twitter over three months in 2010, which highlighted BBC News, the Guardian and Reuters as the top influencers with the greatest content on their site, illustrating the influence media has on how consumers get news (Newman, 2011). Furthermore, media sources aligning primarily with a particular political direction will unduly influence their audience. For example, Fox News, The Washington Post and Breitbart in the USA

are generally Conservative with 'Huffpost', Vice and CNN being of liberal persuasion. This political bias then presents itself into the way the outlet reports its news (Booten, 2020). Therefore, the primary objective of the media in being an information provider to the public is not all it seems, but instead can direct and influence the way they accept changes in society (Lewandowsky et al., 2012).

This is particularly relevant in the relationship between the media and taser use by police officers. The media seem to be biased against the police, often directing criticism to the overuse or overzealous use of taser (Murray, 2022). Many stories involving taser simply imply or directly link the actions of the officer and the use of taser to the death or serious injury of the recipient (Higgins, 2020). However there has not been a credible amount of research linking the events.

A report by Pomper (2018) from the National Police Association suggests American police officers are becoming increasingly frustrated by the media and political leaders creating and promoting an anti-police false narrative, which also draw in well-intended journalists to make assumptions based on a flawed basis. In light of this, earlier in 2015, Guarino (2015) reported that police departments in the USA have developed a counter attack process against these biased media narratives, whereby they have set up their own website to document the role of modern-day policing which allows the public to view everyday activities and positive action.

A report by Harvard Professor Roland G. Fryer Jr. in 2016, found that Police officers were not inclined to link skin colour to "shoot first, ask questions later" (cited in Fryer, 2020). Yet the report has received damning reviews just for the mere suggestion that there isn't a racial motivation by police officers. The study has been subject to scrutiny several times over by different academics in the attempt to disprove his research (Ross, Winterhalder and McElreath, 2018) and later by Knox, Lowe and Mummolo in 2010.

Following the death of professional footballer Dalian Atkinson, who died in 2016 during an incident where taser was deployed, criticism was aimed at excessive police taser use. Between April 2017 and March 2018 there were 12,755 incidents where taser was drawn. Yet only 272 (2%) of these incidents required the taser to be aimed at the subject, with only 36 out of these resulting in the actual firing of the taser unit. This demonstrates that whilst taser is a deterrent, its firing is a last resort.

In response to media reports of taser being indiscriminately aimed at individuals of colour, in the years immediately following the Dalian Atkinson incident, taser was drawn 8,450 times towards persons of white ethnicity as opposed to 3,371 against Black or Asian subjects. Furthermore, full deployment of taser was significantly higher in white subjects ( $n=30$ ) than against black persons ( $n=3$ ) in England and Wales (Home Office, 2018). This clearly demonstrates that ethnic minority race does not determine taser use.

Again, a distinct lack of research into the effects of carrying taser and the public scrutiny through bias media reports is evident. The researcher could not find any credible sources or reports to suggest whether the media attention has a direct correlation to the decision making of an officer and whether to draw taser.

## **2.4 To explore if there is a desire amongst officers to carry a taser**

Throughout this work, the researcher has found minimal research to support the desire of officers to carry taser. Whilst there have been several surveys and reviews detailing the roll out of taser units for officers (Ipsos 2022, IPOC 2018), these tend to only gather information on public perception of officers carrying taser or the overall usage of taser in incidents and the resultant injuries. The researcher has extensively searched all sources of information including reports, internet searches, blogs, and library resources. The only credible opinion of officers and their desire to carry taser is detailed in a 2019 survey conducted by the Police Federation (cited in IPSOS, 2022), which considers the requests by officers to carry taser and their associated thoughts.

Findings in this 2019 Ipsos Mori survey (cited in IPSOS, 2022) indicate that 89% of officers would want to routinely carry taser after receiving appropriate training. This figure is a large rise in support for the carrying of taser by officers from the same survey conducted three years previous which found 57% of officers would be in favour of being armed with taser. The survey shows 89% of officers with less than 5 years' service would like to carry taser compared to 81% of officers with 15 years' service or more. The demographic of officer's surveyed were 18 years to 55+ in age with the biggest response to the survey coming from age ranges of 25 to 54. The survey also shows a decline of the numbers supporting the roll out of taser from 93% in ages 18-24 down through age range of 35-44 at 82% and down again to 73% for 55+ age group. Further results established that the desire for front line officers to carry taser remained constant within departments throughout the service. Eighty-two percent of actual front-line officers would request taser roll out, compared to 79% of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) agreeing that front-line officers should be provided with taser. 87% of central communications units and 74% of administrative support departments agreed to roll out amongst front line officers. Similar results arose between 5784 collective male and female respondents. 83% male and 76% female agreed to more officers having taser access after training. Results across experienced, senior officers also were constant, where more than 81% of each professional group including sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors all following the agreement to routine carrying of taser trend amongst front-line officers (Dr Denis van Mechelen, 2017).

## **2.5 To explore if carrying taser influences officer mental health**

Despite an anticipated high evidence base in relation to this subject area, the researcher found there to be almost no information gathered and analysed by any academic bodies. Whilst there has been a large amount of research conducted towards the psychological effects on the recipient of the taser use, the researcher has found very little in the way of psychological impact the taser deployment has on the officer.

However, what is evident in the evidence is that police officers are classified as being in a high-risk category for developing mental health issues, in part due to the traumatic scenes witnessed by officers daily, rather than taser use specifically. Research also seems to indicate that officers have a resilience to the effects of traumatic events arising from education and exposure provided during their training (Regehr et al., 2019). Due to a lack of British studies into the area, the researcher had to expand the search by utilising studies conducted in America.

A survey by Jetelina et al., (2020) of 434 police officers in Dallas, USA into the prevalence of mental illness and state of mental health amongst police officers, found 12% to have a lifetime mental health diagnosis and 26% displaying current symptoms of mental illness. The findings suggested the need for regular mental health screenings for officers to systematically identify struggling officers and refer them for well-being support and help.

Conducted over a period of April 2019 to November 2019 the survey identified that in 2019 twice as many officers died of suicide compared to dying in the line of duty within the Buffalo area of New York. The suicide rates amongst active officers were 8.4 times higher among active officers compared to retired officers. Of the officers who participated, with a mean age of 38 for participants with 11 years' service, 94% were male with 54% being white. Of the research already conducted by previous academic's there was very little in the way of links between carrying taser and the effects on the officer.

Further to this there has been no studies conducted on the mental health and wellbeing of officers after the deployment of taser during an incident.

## Chapter Three

# Methodology

### 3.0 Introduction.

This chapter will deliver an overview of methods used to achieve the research aims; to investigate and explore the carrying and use of taser, in terms of police officer mentality and media representation of the device. It will also consider the commitments of this dissertation and explain how they fall into line with ethical standards. The rest of the methodology will then detail and explain methods employed for the research.

### 3.1 Research Aims and Objectives

The intention of the study is to build on the minimal information already available in relation to taser use and police officer interaction with the device. The previous chapter identified that there is very little evidence available relating to the effects felt by officers when carrying and using a taser device. Furthermore, media representation can inadvertently influence public opinion in the use of taser amongst police officers. Therefore, the researcher has constructed the following objectives to guide their research: wishes to investigate these concepts by addressing the following:

1. 1 To investigate if serving officers feel there is a necessity to carry taser in their role
2. 2 To explore if the media's portrayal of taser is having an impact on officer's use of taser.
3. 3 To explore if carrying taser influences officer's mindset.

By conducting the research, it is hoped the information gathered will be reliable and used for future learning within the industry.

### 3.2 Ethical Practice

When conducting research, it is imperative that the methods used to gather the information are utilised in an ethical way and that they conform to the standards of the ethics, prior to any research starting. The researcher is required to adhere to the strict rules of ethical standards to deliver integrity, morality, and fairness for all involved. At the core of ethical research are two principles; firstly, any research should be done for a good reason, a principle known as beneficence (Beauchamp, 2019). Secondly, the principle of non-maleficence assures that no harm is inflicted on participants prior to, during and following the research (De Vries and Verhagen, 2008).

To ensure that these two principles are maintained throughout, the researcher needs to inform the participant and obtain consent. Secondly the researcher must minimise any risk to the participant by ensuring anonymity and maintaining confidentiality. Finally, participants should be given the right to withdraw from the research at any point (Lund Research Ltd, 2012).

By aligning with and maintaining high ethical standards when researching, the results obtained become more credible, generated through trust between researcher and participants, whilst also having confidence in the process and anticipated outcomes of the study. The participants human rights and dignity must be paramount when conducting the research which will in turn lead to a more honest account from the source (Bhandari, 2022).

### **3.3 Independence and impartiality**

In this research project, in order to protect the legitimacy of the research and provide confirmation that the research wouldn't be compromised, the researcher used an approved research ethics form to express to the Ethics Committee their impartiality. In doing so, this allowed the researcher and their project to protect the rights and ensure the security of participants (Siegel, 1979). The researcher had no known relationship to the research nor participants that could compromise the integrity of the study. Once complete, the ethics form was completed and submitted to the University Ethics Committee, whom granted permission for the research to be conducted.

### **3.4 Ethical research and participant confidentiality**

When conducting research, it is essential that the views of the participants are presented accurately and as the applicant intended. To establish this, every effort should be made to negate the possibility of bias from the researcher (Galdas, 2017).

In aligning with research ethic principles in terms of protecting the information provided by the participants, a password protected database was set up to store the sensitive material. This database was only accessible by the researcher with no other unauthorised personnel allowed access. The study did not require the participants to supply any personal details.

Provided in the disclaimer at the start of the survey, participants were informed that any information provided would be stored and subsequently destroyed upon completion of the research, as per guidelines cited online in the Gov.UK service manual (GOV.UK, 2018). The disclaimer also explained the rights of the

participants and detailed how they had the right to leave the survey or withdraw their participation from the survey at any time (Cleave, 2016).

By ensuring all the applicants were aware the survey was free from prejudice and conducted on a voluntary basis, the contributors could give an accurate and honest responses and provide their informed consent (Hillmer, 2022).

### **3.5 Research Methods**

The research was conducted using a mixed methods approach which involved the use of qualitative and quantitative data. Nenty (2009) advocated that the use of quantitative questions facilitates rapid data collection, which in this study allowed the researcher to transfer data to tangible numerical data quickly and with ease. Quantitative data can be a very quick way of gathering data, but it has its limitations regarding answers being static with no room for explanation or elaboration (Bryman, 1984). To overcome this obstacle, the researcher incorporated the use of qualitative questions. This facilitated the option for the applicant to answer sections of the survey where the appropriate answer wasn't available to choose from the preset list. This approach facilitated the option for participants to add additional information, relating to their personal experiences, which provides authenticity to the study. Sofaer (1999) supports this approach whereby qualitative questions serve as a way of adding in detail and can also be used as a gateway to extract extra information allowing the contributor to expand on basic data given.

### **3.6 Research tools**

Due to time constraints and the target demographic being primarily police officers working a 24/7 rostered shift pattern, it was decided to place the survey on an internal work-based intranet page which allowed anonymity for participants through a canvased approach. Contributors were not specifically targeted by the researcher, so instead facilitating the information collation to be provided voluntarily, which added to authenticity and honesty of responses (Nosenzo and Tufano, 2017).

Voluntary participation enhances research validity and is recognised by most field experts to be a more reliable source of information due to the free, more flexible online environment (Kilinc and Firat, 2017).

Wright (2017) suggests that a benefit to online surveys and questionnaires can also be seen in the minimisation of administration costs. But also, additional benefits to non-face to face surveys allow participants to speak freely without the constraints of feeling awkward at question-and-answer interviews (Wright, 2017).

### **3.7 Pilot study**

An important process within a study is to include a pilot study (Morin, 2013). An early-stage pilot study allows the opportunity to test the study's practicality and viability, rather than testing the hypothesis (Morin, 2013). In this particular project, the pilot study demonstrated to the researcher that they had chosen the best research tool for this study. Through the pilot study, the researcher was able to clarify that the survey was easy to navigate for participants and was digitally ergonomic.

Through the pilot study, the researcher was able to identify problems with the questions, and was able to make small changes to the questionnaire to enhance the quality of the data, as suggested by Hassan et al, in 2006. Kim (2010) further suggests that by conducting a pilot study, the researcher can become aware of any logistical issues with the questionnaire also and affords the researcher opportunities to alter the format or questionnaire lay out, which was the case in this study.

### **3.8 Sampling technique**

In order for the research to be authentic and relevant in its findings, the study questionnaire had to target specific occupational demographics of the participants. In this case, the target population was to be police officers, in order to establish genuine responses in carrying and using a taser device. Another imperative detail was the need for the participants to have already acquired the skill and training of taser.

In choosing to utilise the internal Police Intranet, this allowed for the dissemination of the questionnaire to a target audience. As the online platform was internal, it allowed officers to complete the electronic questionnaire in the knowledge that it would remain anonymous and within the confines of the police family. The researcher took all reasonable steps to ensure the target audience were the only participants. The disclaimer at the start of the questionnaire explained the rights and entitlements of every individual who took part and was available for a period of two weeks. This short window of availability ensured the target audience had enough time to contemplate the taking part and time for its completion.

## Chapter Four

# Analysis of Results

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter will analyse the findings of the online questionnaire completed by police officers in relation to the use of taser and its impact on their psychological approach. The survey was distributed to serving Welsh police officers, whose characteristics and skill sets were appropriate to establish an authentic balance to the anticipated results. The survey of police taser trained officers was used to gain informed opinions and experiences around the topic area.

The questionnaire had an estimated completion rate of 71% but the researcher achieved a 100% completion rate from 20 responders, which was conducted over a 4-day period.

The online questionnaire link was sent via internal email systems, ensuring that all read receipt functions were disabled, to avoid inadvertent email notifications to the researcher from participants; which would have compromised the confidentiality. This anonymous approach was designed to stay within the confines of ethics and confidentiality and served to confirm to the participant their anonymity. Despite 50 questionnaires being available for online distribution, it was realised that response rate may be low due to contributing factors ranging from shift pattern, rest days, annual leave, and sick absences. However, given the short time frame of 4 days, 20 responses were received.

The online questionnaire was constructed of 8 quantitative questions and 2 qualitative questions resulting in an 80:20 ratio.

### 4.2 Participants

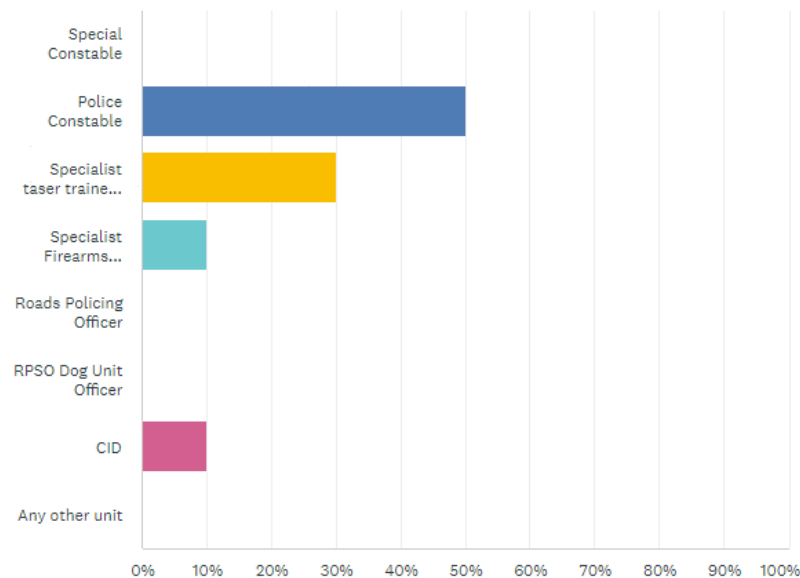
The first question within the survey was: *What is your role?*

Choosing this as the first question was important to quickly identify the skills area of the responder and to gauge whether the relevant demographics were being represented. Eighty per cent ( $n=16$ ) of the responders identified as frontline officers with taser skills. Ten per cent ( $n=2$ ) identified as dedicated firearms officers. A further 10% ( $n=2$ ) identified primarily as office-based constables from CID. The participant demographic (figure 1) is similar to that found in the study conducted by Yolander Waters in 2017, which investigated the psychological impact of taser use, which the researcher felt was of relevance and comparable to his data.

Figure 1

## What is your role?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



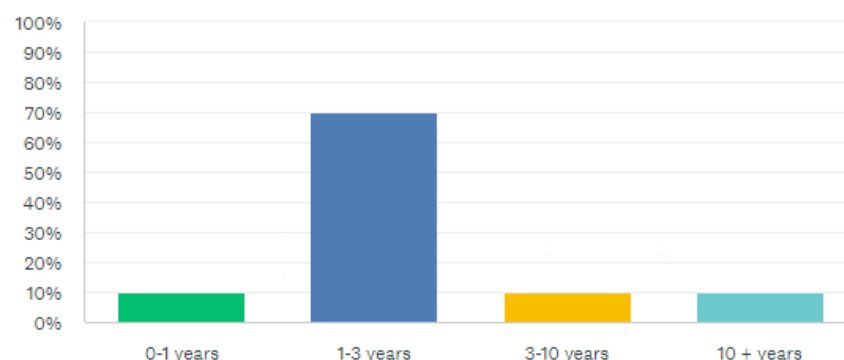
The second question asked *How long have you had taser?*

This was designed to gain a snapshot of how experienced the officers were in actual taser deployment incidents. Research has shown that learned experiences from previous similar situations can impact how a person deals with a new incident (Slovic and Peters, 2023). Seventy per cent of respondents ( $n=14$ ) reported having access to a taser for 1-3 years, with only ten per cent using it for 0-1, 3-10 and 10 or more years respectively (figure 2).

Figure 2

## How long have you had taser?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



### 4.3 Interactions

Questions 3 and 4 focussed on information arising from the nature of the duty activity being performed at the time of a taser incident.

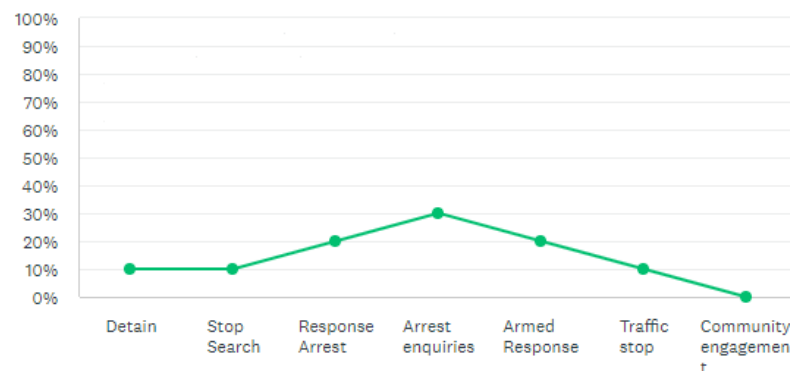
The questionnaire identified inconsistencies in the regularity of times when officers were required to attend taser incidents. Thirty per cent of officers had encountered incidents requiring taser daily, rising to forty per cent on a weekly occurrence. The graph also shows a swing in the opposite direction with 30% having infrequent needs for the taser use of force (figure 3). Definitions to the use of force can range from unholstering the taser, “arc” the taser, “red dotting” and/or full deployment.

Each responder to question 3 had been involved in a taser use of force since gaining taser skilling with a full range of officer duties requiring taser being undertaken.

Figure 3

What duty were you performing during the last incident of conflict?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



### 4.3 Response from officers

Question five asked participants *Were you carrying taser at the time of a recent incident?*

Eighty per cent ( $n=16$ ) of participants confirmed they had recently been carrying taser during deployment to an incident involving conflict. In reflecting on this question, the addition of a further qualitative question could have explored the opinions of the remaining 20% ( $n=4$ ) non-carrying taser participants.

Question 6 asked if carrying a taser changed their approach to the subjects / incident.

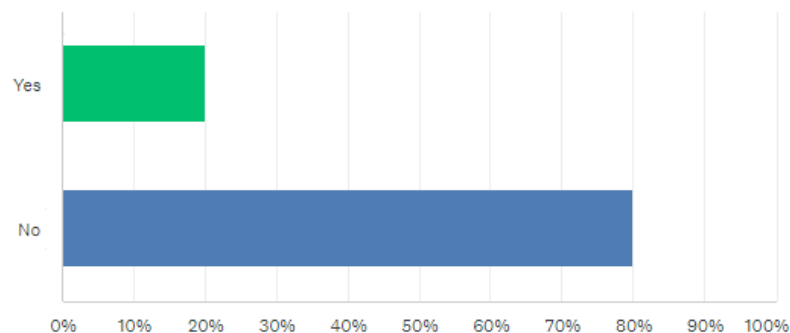
This question was chosen to establish if carrying the taser prompted any psychological impacts to the way the officer approached the incident, knowing they had direct access to the device. Eighty per cent ( $n=16$ ) declared that it had no effect on their mindset, which would suggest that the training of officers in taser use

was effective. Another opinion extracted from these results indicate that officers are prepared to attend a potentially dangerous incident without the protection of taser. (Figure 3)

Figure 3

### Did this change your approach to the subjects/incident?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



Questions 7 and 8 asked officers to consider the effect taser had on their psychological approach to incidents.

The results from question 7; requesting positive responses, demonstrated 90% of all responders reported a sense of control, authority, and calmness when in possession of taser. An overwhelming majority of 60% stated they had a sense of confidence from the carrying of taser.

Question 8, in asking for negative effects, identified that 57% declared a change in order of tactics when dealing with the incident, with 42% admitting to an over reliance of taser due to its presence. Other options available within the answers of “overconfident” and “increase in aggression” failed to receive any responses.

## 4.5 Effects of taser on mindset

Questions 9 and 10 were generated to qualitative answers. This approach allowed for the officer to give a personal view to the research, as detailed by Fossey et al., 2002. Participants were provided with an opportunity to write their own responses in their own words

The following was received in response to officer mindset prior to an incident or conflict when carrying taser, which highlight concern:

*“Worry and concern how it will affect the subject and if it goes wrong or receive complaints”*

Another answer expressed a sense of safety due to the taser being a user option.

*“I have carried Taser for over 10 years and only discharged it twice. I believe that the earlier in my career when carrying Taser, it gave me much more confidence that I could deal with violent subjects especially when on route to an incident where violence is reported.”*

The answers gained from the survey to the qualitative question 10, suggests an acknowledgment of the tasers presence and a reliance on the training received to stay calm and rationalise the strategy. The answer also suggests the taser becomes a secondary backup if the incident escalates.

*“Again, increases confidence, due to the training that complies with taser usage. Allow to you better manage conflict and allows for an additional use of force if ever required.”*

and

*Mid incident I am usually aware that the taser may be needed and try to be more aware of my surroundings in case the taser is needed. However, as above, I find this is not always the case when not all officers are trained in taser use and prefer to scramble on the floor with aggressive people, instead of the calm and controlled tactical communications that come with the different levels of taser use.*

## 4.6 Analysis

By analysing the overall quantitative results and individual qualitative responses to the questionnaire of Officers, the researcher was able to identify a far greater determination from frontline taser trained officers to express opinions. A combined 80% of police constables and specialist taser officers provided their time to participate and provide their opinions. This response would suggest that participant demographics played a significant part and demonstrated that officers who are under pressure in their work are keen to present their opinions in a safe environment that listens, and is empathetic to their cause, rather than unpleasant and critical media responses; a concept identified by (González, 2021).

With a lack of responses from other sections of the workforce the researcher could not get an accurate representation of the overall feeling by officers towards the effects on their approach to taser incidents. The responses only allowed for a generalised opinion from 4 areas of officers.

During the next chapter, a conclusion of the findings will be explored with the aim of establishing an answer to the question *“Does the presence of taser affect an officers’ approach to an incident of conflict?”*

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter will detail the main conclusions from the research, whilst also revisiting the objectives set out in the introduction to

- Establish if the aims of the dissertation have been met.
- Evaluate if the results of the research concur or contradict the current evidence examined in the literature review.

#### 5.2 Summary of findings

The objectives of this dissertation were to explore police officer's opinions to the need to carry Taser; to consider if the presence of a taser device impacted the officer's mindset to managing an incident and whether negative external influences can impact its use by the officer.

Twenty participants recruited to the study via an online survey demonstrated professionalism in their use and carrying of taser. The anonymity of the survey seemed to facilitate honest and genuine answers from officers, who placed trust in their taser device training, a concept reflected also by Sousa, Ready and Ault in their text in 2010.

The findings also illustrate that officers are consistent in their approaches to incidents irrespective of whether they carry taser or not. These findings contradict Adams and Jennison's (2007) viewpoint, which anticipated a change in officer behaviours and order of 'use of force' tactics.

#### 5.3 Objectives

##### 5.3.1 To investigate if serving officers feel there is a necessity to carry taser in their role

Qualitative questioning used within the questionnaire provided the opportunity for officers to give authentic and truthful opinions. This approach attempted to address the gap in existing literature and research which had not been explored in any depth previously. Participants were invited to reflect on real life situations they had been involved in, where their views demonstrated that the Taser was considered a valued piece of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which served as a reserve option if the occurrence was to deteriorate (Sousa, Ready and Ault, 2010).

### **5.3.2 To explore if carrying taser influences officer's mindset, pre, during and post incident.**

Participants were asked if having taser changed their approach to a subject or incident. The purpose of this opening question was to determine if an officer's attitude, changed due to the option of taser as a 'use of force,' where 80% of participants reported no change in their initial behaviour. This response by officers endorses existing research by Regehr et al (2019) and would indicate a resilience to traumatic situations.

Officers were asked to comment on the positive effects that carrying and using taser had on them. A lack of current evidence in this subject matter, meant that responses to this question could not be compared to any preceding research. However, in this piece of work, an overall majority of officers highlighted feelings of confidence and authority when approaching the incident. Further investigation would be recommended into this.

The survey also asked the participants to identify a negative effect on the officer's mindset through the possession of taser during an incident. Fifty-seven per cent of participants declared a change in their tactics due to the taser presence, which would suggest officers are aware of the availability of the taser as an extra option of PPE but not the immediate choice of force.

Research into the 'weapons effect' by Benjamin, Kepes, and Bushman, (2017) identifies the effects on the recipient, rather than on the officer carrying the taser. Other evidence indicates that the presence of taser can provoke subjects to display more aggression towards the officer which in turn then prompts the officer to raise their aggression levels to combat the behaviour (Ariel et al., 2018). This cycle of officer response to subject behaviour is known as 'Betari Box'; a process which anticipates a subject's behaviour resulting from a perpetrator's initial actions (Changing minds, 2019). However, in this work, this phenomenon is not clearly identified when carrying a taser.

Again, the use of qualitative questions encouraged participants to elaborate on their own individual feelings and provided the researcher with humanistic responses. Amongst the qualitative answers were concerns for the officer and any repercussions if the subject were to get injured. Another respondent also denoted that the training given to officers prepared them for live scenarios. Again, there had been no research conducted into this theory prior to the questionnaire and therefore the researcher could not compare the results to any previous results.

## 5.4 Recommendations

The researcher anticipated a larger response, and was disappointed by the low return through 20 participants. However, the data received from these subjects was honest and significant, with much corroborating with current literature, although there were some surprises. The low participation could be explained by several factors; most notably the short time the questionnaire was presented. The distribution did not factor in influences of sick leave, holiday leave, shift patterns and caution in management and establishment in fear of repercussion. Therefore, a larger more inclusive study, set over a longer duration would be beneficial in investigating these objectives further.

Due to the ever-changing role of an officer, conducting a longitudinal study which would explore officers' opinions over a period of time would also be beneficial in expanding the body of knowledge on how the use of taser impacts the approach.

## 5.5 Final thoughts

Through review of current literature into the effects of taser on the mindset of officers, it is evident there is a disproportionate bias towards the welfare of the receiver over the officer. It is also evident through reviewing literature that officer mental welfare is often overshadowed to that of the subject. Furthermore, the negative and damaging opinions from mainstream media have a large impact on how officers with taser are perceived. Police officers are under huge pressure to deal with subjects in a respectful and humane way even when the offender is violent and aggressive towards the officer.

From the short survey conducted by the researcher, an opinion can be formed to suggest officers do not react differently to violent offenders, which is attributed to the training they receive during initial Officer safety training (OST) and taser training. From the survey, officers have also shown the taser to be a secondary form of PPE and is not used as the primary tactical option. This was in direct contrast to the opinions of the media. The lack of respondents to the survey served for a limited result and with hindsight a larger target demographic would have allowed for a more comprehensive result.

## Chapter Six

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## Chapter Seven

### Appendix

#### Questionnaire: Does Taser Affect the Mindset of Officers

##### Disclaimer

This questionnaire is for England and Wales police officers only with the aim to ascertain views and opinions of the subject. I am currently a PEQF student within Gwent police and currently in my 3rd and final year of the Policing degree and dissertation, titled – Does carrying taser affect how officers approach a subject or incident.

I am currently attempting to gain the views of officers on how the taser affects their approach to a subject and if taser has changed their mindset. There is no wrong answer during the questionnaire and the purpose for the questions is to establish the honest views and opinions. Please answer as honestly and as genuinely as possible in order to help me deliver an accurate representation of an officer's feelings.

The questionnaire is completely anonymous and neither myself or any other person accessing the results and information will be able to attribute views back to the individual contributor. Any information shared will be held in strictest confidence and destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

You as a participant have the right to exit the questionnaire at any point without penalty or repercussions, by simply exiting the questionnaire via the (x) on the users browser. By taking part in the questionnaire the partaker gives full consent to the taking part in the research and is over 18 years of age and a serving police officer.

There is no compensation available for taking part and no monetary reward or otherwise available for the participation by the contributor. If you require any further information prior or after taking part in the survey, please contact me on 07870854468 or email - 1922399@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

\*1. What is your role? 🗨 0

- ☐ Special Constable
- ☐ Police Constable
- ☐ Specialist taser trained officer
- ☐ Specialist Firearms Officer
- ☐ Roads Policing Officer
- ☐ RPSO Dog Unit Officer
- ☐ CID
- ☐ Any other unit

2. How long have you had taser? 🗨 0

- ☐ 0-1 years
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 3-10 years
- ☐ 10 + years

3. How often do you encounter conflict? 🗨 0

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Infrequent
- ☐ Never

4. What duty were you performing during the last incident of conflict? 🗨 0

- ☐ Detain
- ☐ Stop Search
- ☐ Response Arrest
- ☐ Arrest enquiries
- ☐ Armed Response
- ☐ Traffic stop
- ☐ Community engagement

5. Were you carrying taser at the time of a recent incident? 0

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. Did this change your approach to the subjects/incident? 0

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. What positive affect did carrying taser have on your approach/ actions 0

☐ Calming

☐ Control

☐ Authority

☐ Confidence

8. What negative affect did carrying taser have on your mindset towards the incident/subject 0

☐ Over confident

☐ Over reliance

☐ Change in Order of Tactic's

☐ Increase in Aggression

9. From your own experience, how does carrying taser affect your mindset Pre- incident? 0

10. From your own experience, how does carrying taser affect your mindset Mid-incident 0