

Research methodology

Through extensive research whereby the author has critically evaluated and analysed the available literature it has become evident that ill mental health is an on going and under addressed issue amongst active police officers of all rank, role's and one whereby the current guidance and support systems in place are fundamentally lacking.

The research has also highlighted that mental health is a highly topical issue, not just amongst law enforcement agencies globally but also within the general public with neither party willing to accept help. Taken from Mind's website (ND) they state *"Approximately only 1 in 8 adults with a mental health problem are currently getting any kind of treatment"*.

Through detailed analysis the author has been able to identify a common theme that is present within all the studies that have been undertaken documenting the issues officers face regarding their mental health and the contributing factors that cause a decline in their mental wellbeing.

Although there has been a vast amount of research conducted on the causes and detrimental effects it has on the officers wellbeing, the author has been able to identify some aspects where current literature does not address or explore what preventive measures can be implemented to ensure the current number of officers suffering with ill mental health does not increase to an unmanageable amount.

In light of this information it is the authors objective to explore options of what preventative measures and support could potentially be implemented to reduce the work based stressors that frontline officers face which can be the root cause in most cases for their ill mental wellbeing and what avenues of on going support is available to provide the much needed support.

Jetelina et al (2020) claim *"Officers are exposed to traumatic calls for service on a daily basis, including child abuse, domestic violence, car crashes, and homicides. Repeated exposure to these stressors and events may be associated with development of mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, somatization, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout"*.

To ensure that the aims and objectives of this research are met effectively, the author must carefully choose the correct research method ensuring that all relevant data is collected to reach the desired outcome.

The author will take the time to explain why the decision to conduct the research through the means of an interpretivist approach has been chosen and why they feel it is the most appropriate

means for the research. In addition to this qualitative research will be utilised and documented the reasonings for choosing this approach and highlighting both the positives and negatives of the method. The overall goal of this research being conducted is to establish the core issues that are detrimental to frontline officers mental wellbeing, what can be implemented to reduce the stress and what support systems can be introduced or improved upon to support officers mental health. The author hopes this will provide a valuable first hand insight in order to further knowledge to the chosen topic.

Although there has been a vast amount of research conducted on the chosen subject, the author feels that there are certain elements absent which will allow a comprehensive review of the ongoing issue at hand. With this in mind the author has considered several methods to gather data to aid in the research subject and has decided that the most suitable and reliable option would be to utilise a primary research approach to allow the author to gather the data first hand through the use questionnaires in an interview setting to ensure the information gathered is done so on a personable level so that the participants feel heard and understood.

As stated by QuestionPro (Nd) *“Primary research is defined as a methodology used by researchers to collect data directly, rather than depending on data collected from previously done research. Technically, they “own” the data. Primary research is solely carried out to address a certain problem, which requires in-depth analysis”*.

In order to gather the required data, the author has chosen to do this via a questionnaire within an interview setting. By adapting a questionnaire format this will enable the author to obtain detailed information that is necessary to further the research and understanding of this chosen topic. The questions within the questionnaire will comprise of ten detailed open ended questions as this will allow for a natural conversation between the author and participant that would not be able if the questions were closed and elicited no response. Reja et al (2003) state *“Open-ended and close-ended questions differ in several characteristics, especially as regards the role of respondents when answering such questions. Close-ended questions limit the respondent to the set of alternatives being offered, while openended questions allow the respondent to express an opinion without being influenced by the researcher”*.

The use of a questionnaire is mutually beneficial for both the author and the participant as both have limited time to be able to conduct the interview, however this is not to be viewed as a negative point as there are a vast amount of advantages of delivering this format personally.

Jones et al (2008) state *“Questionnaires are accepted as having certain advantages over other data-collection methods such as interviews .These include the mainly low cost of data collection and processing, and the minimal training required by the person administering them. They can reach much larger numbers of a target population than would be possible using interviews and can be delivered in a variety of ways, such as verbally, by telephone, electronically as email attachments, or as web links”*.

As with any method there are positives and negatives that are present, after careful consideration and analysing the options, the author believes that they have chosen the most suitable option for the desired result by not overwhelming the participant. Reja et al (2003) all believe *“Inadequate design (e.g. uninteresting, looking too complicated, etc.) may also prevent respondents from starting to answer the questionnaire at all, therefore increasing unit nonresponse”*. Coupled with this, Patten (2016) also stated *“Another disadvantage of questionnaires is that some respondents may be swayed by social desirability. That is, they may give answers that they think are socially desirable-even if they are not fully accurate”*.

Several variables and considerations were taken into place by the author to ensure the validity of the research. The decision was made to conduct the questionnaires in a one to one interview setting, this method was chosen due to the fact that it allows the participant to know that the data they are sharing is being taken seriously and has the added benefit of having the author present to clarify any ambiguities or concerns the participant may have.

Opdenakker (2006) says *“Due to this synchronous communication, as no other interview method FtF interviews can take its advantage of social cues. Social cues, such as voice, intonation, body language etc. of the interviewee can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee on a question”*.

Despite its strengths, this method also has its criticisms as some may believe that having the author there will have the possibility of suggested influence. Reja et al (2003) go on to say *“The advantages of the open-ended questions include the possibility of discovering the responses that individuals give spontaneously, and thus avoiding the bias that may result from*

suggesting responses to individuals, a bias which may occur in the case of close-ended questions”.

To ensure the correct data is gathered it is imperative that the author employs the most appropriate method available to them. The decision must be made whether the author is to gather the data via means of either a qualitative or quantitative approach to achieve the desired result. After careful consideration the decision was made to gather data through the means of qualitative means.

QuestionPro (ND) will say *“Qualitative data can be observed and recorded. This data type is non-numerical in nature. This type of data is collected through methods of observations, one-to-one interviews, conducting focus groups, and similar methods. Qualitative data in statistics is also known as categorical data – data that can be arranged categorically based on the attributes and properties of a thing or a phenomenon”.*

The author has considered two approaches to aid in the research. Both a positivistic approach and interpretive approach were compared to identify the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches. Thompson (2015) claims *“Positivism and Interpretivism are the two basic approaches to research methods in Sociology. Positivist prefer scientific quantitative methods, while Interpretivists prefer humanistic qualitative methods”.*

After careful consideration and extensive research, the author has concluded that the best method will be an interpretive approach due to the fact that it best fits in with the goals of the author. Chowdhury (2014) says *“Interpretivism, by its nature promotes the value of qualitative data in pursuit of knowledge. In essence, this philosophical and research paradigm is concerned with the uniqueness of a particular situation, contributing to the underlying pursuit of contextual depth”.*

In addition to this research has shown that when coupled with an interpretive approach, information gathered by qualitative data provides exceptional responses as the feedback allows the participants and author to explore and provide an explanation for the questions and answers of the questionnaire in a free flowing open conversation.

The decisions to use an interpretive approach over a positivistic approach was made as when comparing and contrasting both methods the research identified that when taking an positivistic approach the information received from the participant may be considered to be too one

dimensional and not allow for open and frank conversations, which are crucial for the author to harvest as much quality and in depth data in the interviews conducted which will not aid in achieving the overall objective set out by the author. *“Historically, perhaps the greatest weakness and hence disadvantage of positivism generally, and with respect to the social sciences in particular, has been its insistence upon methodological absoluteness”*.

The authors intentions is to identify whether the demand placed upon frontline police officers is having a detrimental effect on their wellbeing, through the extensive research conducted on the current literature it is apparent that there are several variables in place such as gender, age, experience and personable firmness of each officer. Ellison (2004) says *“He’s strong; he can take anything, he goes to pieces over the least little problem. Comments of this sort spotlight the common belief that there are large individual differences in the way of people handle pressure”*. This highlights the many variables of each participant.

Considering this it is crucial that the sample participants who are chosen vary by age, rank, years served and department. In order to obtain the best possible information a stratified sampling technique will be implemented. Parsons (2014) say’s *“Stratified sampling is a probability sampling method that is implemented in sample surveys. The target population's elements are divided into distinct groups or strata where within each stratum the elements are similar to each other with respect to select characteristics of importance to the survey”*.

To obtain this data the participants will be placed into three strata’s which are five response officers, five supervisory officers and five officers from a specialist department. All participants will range in age, gender and experience which will provide a rich feedback.

In total fifteen participants will be chosen due to the author and the participants time constraints with the demand of their roles. The author has taken into consideration that there is a large disparity between the population and sample size that could draw criticisms into the findings but has taken the decision to limit the sample size to fifteen to ensure the best possible results are obtained given the limited time available and that implementing a stratified sampling method will yield the best results available. This method was carefully scrutinised and chosen based on its merits, although the author has considered the complexities and concerns that are attached to this chosen method.

Qualtrics (ND) state “*Researchers may hold prior knowledge of the population’s shared characteristics beforehand, which increases the risk for selection bias when strata are defined*”.

Qualtrics (ND) go on to say “*When randomly sampling each stratum, the resulting sample may not be representative of the full population. It is worth reviewing the results to see if the sample is proportional to the whole population*”.

This chosen method does require a considerable amount of effort from the author in terms of collating the data and critically analysing the results, however it is imperative to the author that they are able to gather and present their findings to further aid research into the chosen topic.

Word Count – 1446.

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