

Chapter 3: Research methods

3.1: Introduction

The literature review achieved objectives one and three of this study after examining evolution of female police officers and analysing how the murder of Sarah Everard impacted British policing and wider society. The key findings of the literature review were varied but highlighted a number of issues surrounding gender inequality within a policing environment. The overall theme of the research was that despite the changes in policies and increasing incentives to strive for greater diversity, gender inequality remains a persistent issue within policing and communities alike. This chapter seeks to conduct primary research to complete objective two which is:

Compare and contrast the perceptions of male colleagues, supervisors and the wider community towards female police officers with the perspectives of current, serving, female police officers.

By analysing the viewpoints and perceptions of female officers, male colleagues and the wider community alike, this research seeks to uncover potential disparities, biases and uncover the challenges that remain for female police officers.

3.2: Research Strategy

Gratton and Jones (2010) define research as: '*a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge*'. As the overall aim of this project is to cultivate an understanding of the issues within British policing surrounding gender inequality, as well as exploring the implications this has on female police officers and the wider community, it is essential to conduct primary and secondary research to achieve this.

Primary research involves the collection of original data which is tailored to a specific research project while secondary research analyses existing data and usually provides context and background information on a topic (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The previous chapter utilised secondary research to highlight gaps in the current literature. Primary research will now be required to assist in addressing these gaps and put forward recommendations for improvement.

3.2.1: Methodology:

This research project requires a qualitative approach as it seeks to explore the attitudes, behaviours and experiences from participants. Biggam (2021) describes qualitative research as the study of human behaviour and attempts to answer the why questions by obtaining in depth or quality responses. As this research project seeks to understand the complexities surrounding gender inequality as well as the challenges faced by female police officers, a qualitative study is the most appropriate method for gathering this data.

This research project further details an interpretivist approach as a variety of responses are expected which explore not only the experiences of female police officers but the opinions of the public and their

perception of female police officers. Interpretative research will also allow for further exploration of the findings by other researchers.

This research seeks to build on the research conducted by Cunningham and Ramshaw (2019) where they reviewed the experiences of female officers in England and Wales using qualitative interviews. Whilst Cunningham and Ramshaw used a small sample of 23 participants, this research seeks to obtain a larger sample size through the use of questionnaires. The questionnaire will contain a variety of open and closed questions in order to keep participants engaged and aims to establish the challenges faced by female officers, public perceptions of female police officers' abilities in comparison to their male counterparts and factors preventing more females from joining the police. Due to the varying demographic of participants namely, current serving officers and the general public, consideration was given to the need of differing questionnaires however, this would require additional time in creating and disseminating to the appropriate audience and could cause problems when analysing the data due to varying content.

The overall aim of this research is to critically examine the experiences and perceptions of female police officers and compare this to the perception of the public and other colleagues.

3.2.2: Sampling:

This research project seeks to obtain the views of serving, female police officers who can provide the required insight as well as their male counterparts and the general public for a comparative analysis. The sample size allows for a greater insight into the perspectives of a variety of individuals from different backgrounds and experiences which further demonstrates the need for an interpretive research philosophical approach. The research seeks to obtain 25-75 respondents from serving police officers and an additional 25-50 respondents from the general population. This research aims to build on that by Cunningham and Ramshaw by identifying patterns in the current challenges faced by female officers and identify whether these challenges are contributing to a lack of females joining the police force and as a result, contributing to inequality within British policing. The composition of the final sample size will be detailed within the next chapter of this research project.

3.3: Data Collection & Analysis

Social media will be utilised as a means of disseminating questionnaires to members of the public which will allow for a wider reaching audience. The police force intranet and internal emails will be used to seek the responses of female police officers within the organisation.

Anonymity will be given to participants who partake in the research however some relevant information will be published such as the length of service of officers enabling a higher quality analysing of the data.

3.5: Reliability and Validity

Adhering to ethical principles helps to maintain the credibility and validity of the research findings (Milton, 2019). The data collected will be reliable and credible as it aligns with the objectives set out at the beginning of the research project and builds upon research conducted within the last five years.

3.6: Limitations and Potential Hurdles

Data will be largely obtained from officers serving within one police force which does not provide a consistent account of officers and perceptions across the UK in its entirety. Furthermore, the short timescale in which this research was conducted did not allow for a change in the methodology as the research developed.

3.7: Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations refer to the participation, consent, anonymity, and overall risk of a research project and its participants (Gregory, 2003). Prior to the commencement of this research, approval was obtained from the supporting university's ethics board. During the collection of primary data, participants were advised of the nature of the study as well as how their participation would be utilised when it came to data analysis. Full consent was obtained from the participants and participants also had the right to refuse to partake and could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also given anonymity and did not receive any reward for participating in the study.

3.8: Conclusion

This chapter has identified and demonstrated the most suitable and appropriate form of methodology for the research project. The next chapter will present and analyse the data collected as identified in this chapter.

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Bibliography

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