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- 1) What impact can the challenges of operational policing have on individual and group wellbeing?

Why is it important to manage mental wellbeing in policing?

Your answer must be based on academic research rather than personal experiences.

During this essay I will be discussing the challenges that operational police officers undertake, and the impact that this has on both their individual and group wellbeing. I will conduct research into what causes the impact, such as the operational structure of the police force as well as the type of calls that police officers attend. I will also research the statistics that will show how many police officers are currently affected by mental health illnesses both due to their employment in the police, and otherwise. The challenges that mental health can cause and how to manage them will also be researched during this essay. Case studies will also be included from police officers who have shared their experiences with managing mental wellbeing.

Conducting the role of a police officer is stressful and can have a negative effect on an individual's mental and physical health. Much of the stress is related to the organisational structure, such as time pressured incidents/scenarios, lack of resources and the constant everchanging role itself effecting police officers (McDaniel et al., 2020). The College of Policing has identified six conditions that police officers may suffer with due to the environment they work in, they are, anxiety, depression, burnout, compassion fatigue, primary trauma, secondary trauma (Lewis et al., 2019).

Many police officers will experience situations and incidents that many people will never see or experience due to the role that the job of a police officer entails. Police will attend domestic calls, road traffic accident calls, attend to vulnerable people and also attend sudden deaths, as well as everything in between (College of Policing, no date). Any one of these calls can cause a negative mental reaction for a police officer. Police officers are also often exposed to extremely traumatic events, such as seeing abused children or dead bodies and severe assaults and as such are exposed to suffering with post traumatic stress disorder, PTSD (Violanti, J,

2018). The impact that PTSD can have on an individual varies, however it can lead people to substance abuse, depression and in certain circumstances, suicide.

Police funding has also decreased since the turn of the century and as such has caused a negative ripple effect on new recruits and serving officers. Workload has increased due to the increase of calls being reported. In 2000, a total of just over 5 million reports to the police, ranging from minor thefts to murders, whereas in 2020, there were just over 5 million reports for the category of fraud alone (Census, 2021). This in turn has increased the workload for individual officers. Claire, a former Detective Sergeant who retired due to the negative effect that the role was having on her health made a statement regarding workloads, whereby she said “Quite often I would look around and someone would have their head in their hands, and someone would be crying”, she went on to say “We gave everything, but we are not robots, we are human beings” (Police Federation, 2022).

A survey was conducted by MIND on police officers discussing mental health, whereby 91% of police officers responded stating that they have experienced significant periods of poor mental health whilst at work. (Lewis et al., 2019). Another survey was taken by the Police Federation where 17,000 police officers responded to a survey, with the result being 65% of police officers saying they continued to work whilst they shouldn’t have, due to being in a poor mental state. Finally, in the same survey, 90% of officers indicated poor morale amongst their colleagues and peers (Lewis et al., 2019). With officers continuing to work under these conditions, and without receiving relevant care and support, it is clear why they could suffer with the six conditions identified by the College of Policing.

Group wellbeing and morale for police officers also fluctuates throughout the forces across the UK, unfortunately with many baring on the negative aspect of the scale. Another survey conducted by the Police Federation showed that 95% of police officers felt that the way they were treated by the Government had a negative impact on their morale (Spence, 2023). This is due to the lack of Government funding and backing towards police officers. 81% of Police officers also stated their morale was reduced due to the current pay that Police officers receive. Many Police officers believe that way they see and deal with deserves more recognition across the public sector.

A group or teams morale is not only affected by outside organisational issues, but inside organisational issues. In 2018 sociologists affiliated with the University of Cambridge conducted a study of Police personnel and the findings showed that 12% of Police personnel showed clinical symptoms of Complex PTSD, which causes social disconnection, the feeling

of worthlessness and the inability to deal and cope with emotions (University of Cambridge, 2022). The same researchers conducted a further study to show how this effects morale and overall group wellbeing. The study showed that 90% of officers have experienced trauma and that one in five are showing signs of C-PTSD which has a direct correlation to burnout, one of the six systems pointed out by the College of Policing (University of Cambridge, 2022).

Low morale in the workplace will influence productivity, peer relationships and burnout. The organizational culture of the police is the main cause for the decrease in morale and group wellbeing being below average for the nation (Laoyan, 2024). There are studies that show how morale can be increased, such as increased staffing levels, improving facilities and better leadership. This however has not been cemented into the infrastructure of the policing organisational structure (Lewis, 2022). Low morale and PTSD can arise from attending difficult calls also, such as a violent subject or a suicidal person. This can cause a group of officers to struggle and ultimately effect each other's morale.

Police officers who experience the negative impact that the organisational structure has on them can sometimes recover from the effects, and only display symptoms for a short period of time. PTSD for example can cause police officers to have vivid flashbacks, as if the trauma was occurring again, right there and then (MIND, No date). It can also include nightmares, intense distress at even symbolic reminders of the trauma. PTSD can even cause physical sensations such as pain, sweating and swelling (NHS, 2022). Mild symptoms of PTSD can last for up to four weeks.

However not all police officers are able to recover for the trauma caused from attending calls and being exposed to serious incidents. Gary Cable was a roads policing officer and was also an authorised firearms officer. Gary attended numerous fatal road traffic collisions during his time as a traffic officer and stated, "I think you get to a point where the brain can only take so much". Gary stated there was one moment where he witnessed a male get shot and murdered from the view of his bedroom, to which he had to attend and deal with. This caused him significant trauma, to which he received therapy from Essex Police, which he stated worked, partially. Gary returned to work, however shortly after decided to retire due to his ill mental health and suffering with PTSD (Cable, No date). Gary is one of thousands of Police officers who have been mentally affected by the job and it reinforces the impact that it can have on a person.

Garys story describes that it does not have to be one singular incident that can cause the effect of PTSD or any mental illness, but it can however be the repetition of attending serious calls

that can have a longer lasting effect, and in his case force him into retirement for his own wellbeing.

Managing mental health can be difficult to control, especially if you are not aware of the effects that it is having on you. An example of this, could be burnout. Burnout is caused by constant pressures at work and can make you feel exhausted, anxious and to lose motivation to do your job (MIND, No date). Understanding that you're dealing with burnout is the first step in dealing with the condition. Other ways in dealing with it, are to get enough sleep and to turn off any screens at least an hour before bed, this can relax your brain and allow yourself to recover with sleep (Sun et al., 2024).

An often overlooked support method for mental health is physical activity, it can help with depression, anxiety and PTSD (Preiato, 2023). Exercising allows for the release of a neurotransmitter commonly known as endorphins. Endorphins block pain and increase sensations of pleasure, to which exercise increases your endorphin levels. After people complete a workout they often get an overwhelming sensation of achievement and feel good, this is down to another neurotransmitter working in tandem with the endorphins called endocannabinoids (Reed, 2021).

Another overlooked and sometimes daunting support method in managing mental health is talking to someone about your current mental health (MIND, No date). Whilst working in the police can be the cause of mental illness, there is also the possibility of solely dealing with outside of work issues that can take a toll on your mental health. A retired police inspector, Georgie told her story of how she dealt with mental illness whilst also aiming for promotion in work.

Georgie was undergoing serious mental health illnesses due to her struggles with IVF (Georgie, 2017). Georgie goes on to state that at one point her struggles got so bad, one Christmas eve she seriously contemplated suicide. However a work colleague ultimately saved Georgie's life by contacting her and talking to her. "It is so important to talk to someone" Georgie stated whilst coping with her mental illness. Georgie shares the importance of talking to friends, colleagues and family about mental health, and proudly stated "I am a Police officer, and I suffer from a mental illness". Mark Vahrmeyer, a UKCP psychotherapist said "Human beings are relational animals", in short meaning that we are dependant on relationships for our wellbeing, not only during our childhood, but throughout our whole life (Vahrmeyer, No date).

Research has shown that the vast majority of police officers are suffering with mental health illnesses (MIND, No date). These illnesses range from anxiety, PTSD, depression and in the worst cases, suicide. The studies conducted by the police federation divulge into why police officers are suffering with their mental health, such as their workload, management and the organisational structure itself (Police Federation, 2022). Ultimately this sample is not taken from one police force, but from all of them across the United Kingdom. The results show that there is much more that needs to be done, by the police forces and government itself to support the police officers who undertake a number of roles throughout their employment. Case studies from police officers who have spoken out about their struggles, show how close police officers can come to the edge, and it is down to management and supervisors to spot the signs early and ensure police officers are supported.

Words - 1843

- 2) What lessons have been learned from recent high-profile critical and major incidents, and how have these translated into best practice for policing?

Your answer must be based on academic research rather than personal experience, but you may refer to recent examples of high-profile critical and major incidents.

During this essay I will reflect on how policing has changed since it was first introduced and how there have been many changes throughout its lifetime (Lambert, 2021). I will research high profile and major incidents where the police have been involved, such as the Brixton Riots in 1981 (Brenton, 2010), the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 (BBC, 2018), and also the Soham murders that occurred in 2003 (Hainey, 2022). I will then examine how the police have changed and reacted to these incidents, and as such translated this into best practice for policing. I will also cover how in more recent times, how the media and use of social media has created a different outlook on modern day policing, especially regarding high profile incidents involving police officers, such as the murder of Sarah Everard (Wallis, 2024).

Policing as a whole has significantly changed since its origin in 1829, where it was founded by Sir Robert Peel in London (Lambert, 2021). The amount of police forces, police officers and police staff has increased since the 1900s, to which they are now at a point where there

are 48 civilian police forces in the United Kingdom (Brown, 2021) and approximately 147,000 full time police officers (Gov.uk, 2024) across the country.

The advancement in technology and the attitudes of society has led to the adaptations and changes within the police forces across the country. Unlike the 1900s the police also now have technology to assist them, such as fingerprints and bloody samples to that were discovered in 1901 which led to matching of DNA to criminals in 1988 (BBC, No date). 1930 saw the introduction of police radios and the police car. In recent times the introduction of police helicopters, breathalysers and CCTV has also assisted police in the catching of criminals (NPCC, 2023).

Police forces have continued to adapt to the ever changing movement of society, such as in 1915 when the first female police officer Edith Smith was appointed in Grantham Borough Police. She was appointed to deal with the prostitution in the county, however this sparked the beginning of a new influx of female police officers (Hennessey, 2021). Another example is the first openly gay police officer Harry Daley, who was appointed a police constable in the Metropolitan constabulary in 1925 (Bourne, 2021). This appointment was seen as a significant moment for policing and homosexuality in the police at the time, due to homosexuality being illegal at the time, however showed that acceptance was being shown within the police.

Policing and adaptability go hand in hand, there must be significant moments and at times mistakes have to be made to learn from them in the future, there must also be times where major or critical incidents have occurred where police have had to adapt and learn from them (Police Federation, No date).

One of the first high-profile critical incidents that changed policing was in 1981 in Brixton, South London, where between 10th and 12th April, riots between black youths and the Metropolitan police broke out due to the racist discrimination from the mainly white police force against the black youths in the community (Brenton, 2010). There were many factors that led to the riots, such as tensions in the area due to 65% of the unemployed being black, a house fire where 13 young black youths had died in a suspicious manner, and most notably in the 5 days leading up to the rioting, there were 943 stop searches conducted by police officers on black youths (Fraga, 2021).

The aftermath of the riots had a rippling effect on both the community of Brixton and the police force. Approximately 299 police officers were injured as well as 65 members of the

public, and there were 282 arrests made (Brenton, 2010). Millions of pounds of damage were caused to property belonging to both those involved and incident bystanders' property during the riots. The first use of firebombs were seen on the streets of Britain during the riots which is what caused severe damage and injuries those injured (Hogsbjerg, 2009).

An enquiry into the riots was conducted by Lord Scarman, where he found evidence that police officers had used their 'stop & search' powers in a very questionable manner that showed discrimination towards black youths (Law, 2015). As a result of The Scarman report, and to increase public confidence, the Police and Evidence act 1984 was conformed. This new legislation had resigned the framework in how police officers could utilise their powers to deal with criminality, whilst also balancing the right of an individual against the police (LawTeacher, 2013).

PACE is now cemented into modern policing and taught thoroughly in modern police training, showing that the riots that were caused in 1981 have had an undeniable impact on modern policing. The Metropolitan police have said that it is now a completely different force to the one that was present during the Brixton riots, and the police commissioner Cressida Dick stated she will not tolerate racism within the force. However, Sheldon who was present during the Brixton riots stated, "What happened in 1981 needed to happen, but the inequality in society that existed in the 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's still exist today", which is why he is still fighting to this day, and shows that there is still lessons to be learnt within the British police (Clifton, 2021).

Since 1984 there was continued positive change within the police force, such as the removal of height restrictions in the early 1990's for the Metropolitan Police (Boggs, 2017). However, it was not long until British policing was under scrutiny once again, this time in 1993 after the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence. Five white suspects were arrested, however not charged with the murder of Stephen Lawrence, and thus was due to the failings of the investigation by the Metropolitan Police (BBC, 2018). A report conducted in 1997 by Sir William Macpherson on the murder of Lawrence, shared that there were complete failings by the police and that the investigation had been "marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers".

It then took 18 years of campaigning by Stephen Lawrences family until justice was sought and two of the suspects were convicted of his murder in 2012 (Narwal, 2023). These high profile cases are taught and examined in modern policing today, and show that positive action may be taken, such as after the Brixton riots, but there is continued room to improve, and in

Stephen Lawrence's investigation, shows there is a need and requirement to improve and hold higher standards.

When a police force makes a mistake or an error, there is usually an inquest into the failings, such as the Scarman report for the Brixton riots or the Macpherson report for the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Another report that was conducted was the Birchard report. This report was published in June 2004, the year after Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, two 10 year old girls, were murdered by their school caretaker Ian Huntley (Hailey, 2022).

The report was launched due to information that Ian Huntley, prior to his role as a school caretaker, was known to the authorities for eleven different allegations of criminal offences, with nine of them being related to sexual offences. The Birchard report launched an inquiry into both the Humberside Police and the Cambridgeshire Constabulary into how they conduct their record keeping and sharing of information (Netex, 2023).

The report shared that there were failings into the sharing of information between relative police forces, as well as failings by other agencies, that allowed Ian Huntley to become employed where there are vulnerable children within his constant proximity. Birchard recommended that a new system was required for people working with vulnerable adults and children, and that a national information technology system for police in England and Wales was needed, that would alert forces of intelligence held by other forces in the United Kingdom. (Netex, 2023).

This recommendation came into fruition in 2011, where the Police National Database (PND) was created. The PND allows for the sharing of information and intelligence between forces in England and Wales, and is different to that of the Police National Computer (PNC). Whereas PNC holds records of convictions, the PND will serve to provide police forces with intelligence to attempt to prevent offences from occurring (College of Policing, 2016).

If this technology was installed prior to the employment of Ian Huntley, then he would not have gained the position of the school caretaker, and the unfortunate events that occurred could have been avoided.

Although these public inquiries completed by Scarman, Macpherson and Birchard have found flaws in the public service provided by police forces, and ultimately damages the reputation of the police, it is an important avenue to learn from, which many police forces are doing

(Coolican, 2020). Without the public demanding answers from these incidents, it would not be an extremity to believe that not much would change.

Much has changed in recent times regarding the media coverage surrounding high profile or critical incidents. Since 2010 social media has provided a platform for people to speak freely, expressing their opinions on such matters. As such, when a critical incident occurs in modern day, there is a lot more attention surrounding it, whether it be positive or negative. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center of 2600 police officers, states that 8 in 10 police officers believe that the media treat the police unfairly (Gramlich, 2017).

Public confidence has also been lost in the police after there have been multiple high profile incidents involving police officers, such as the Charing Cross scandal, where messages joking about rape and offensive material were shared in an exchange of messages between police officers (BBC, 2022). The murder of Sarah Everard by serving police officer Wayne Couzens, and the failings of police forces regarding this investigation has severely affected the public confidence, and understandably damaged the police reputation (Wallis, 2024).

Sir Thomas Winsor, a Chief Inspector, has released annual assessments as to how the state of policing in England and Wales currently is. Winsor reflected on the recent evidence of toxic behaviours, actions and attitudes by some police officers and stated, “when the public trust in the police is damaged, it is essential that public reassurance in the integrity and professionalism of the police is restored” (Winsor, 2022). This assessment also demonstrates that police do respond and learn from these high profile and major incidents, and when in the public eye, do admit to their failings.

The Chief Inspector also said “Policing has come a long way but major problems still persist” (Winsor, 2022). Times have changed since 1829 when Sir Robert Peel first formed the original police force, and much has been learnt by police forces across the United Kingdom. However, these recent high profile incidents show that there is still much to be learnt by police forces and more needs there is a need for higher standards still within the force.

In conclusion, the police seem to be involved more and more in scandals and incidents, where there is pressure building from the public for a change in how the police is managed. With each incident there seems to be a change in the system, however a new story will then emerge and a different lesson is then learnt. Ruth Halkon, a research officer believes that the police need to focus more on past mistakes and history to allow for a brighter future, however she believes that there is so much demand and pressure in current policing, only the present can

be managed (Halkon, 2022). Police forces across the country need to continue to evolve and develop and regain the confidence and trust that has been broken with the public, by continuing to learn lessons, and adopt an attitude of prevention rather than reaction.

Words -1987

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