

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 experience.

Policing, specifically relating to policing in the United Kingdom, is commonly known to be a stressful and high-intensity profession which is characterised by the constant exposure to traumatic incidents and high-pressure situations (Edwards and Kotera, 2020). Edwards and Kotera (2020) further state that unaddressed mental health issues in policing have profound consequences, including reduced productivity, diminished public trust, and negative impacts on organisational culture. This essay aims to critically examine the impact of operational policing challenges on individual and group wellbeing, using relevant and up-to-date academic research to highlight the importance of managing mental wellbeing within policing. Additionally, this essay further aims to explore key issues within operational policing such as the long-lasting effects of exposure to traumatic incidents, occupational stress, group dynamics, displaying analysis through sources for the management of mental wellbeing.

Mental well-being, according to Baldwin et al. (2021) is the state of mentally thriving in all facets of life, including relationships, employment, recreation, and both positive and negative experience. This includes social, emotional, and psychological well-being and aids people to manage life's challenges, reach their full potential. Operational policing exposes officers to numerous stressors, including critical incidents, violent encounters, and prolonged work hours, which can often result in both psychological and physiological consequences. Relating to this, research by Carleton et al. (2018) found that Canadian police officers exhibited significantly higher rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression compared to the general population, displaying the result of exposure to these negative incidents. Andersen et al. (2018) further supports these findings by stating that prolonged exposure to traumatic incidents not only heightens the risk of mental health conditions but also contributes to emotional dysregulation and burnout, all impacting an officer's mental wellbeing.

One of the most common and well-known issue to officers serving within the United Kingdom is the lack of a 'normal' sleep pattern, sleep deprivation and fatigue. Sørengaard et al., (2021) states that sleep deprivation can have detrimental impacts on one's performance, personal safety, and mental and physical well-being at work. To further support this statement, Sørengaard et al., (2021) conducted primary research consisting of approximately 206 police employees, suggesting that adults aged 26–64 years should sleep 7-9 hours a day, as sleep duration under 6 hours and over 10 hours was found unfavourable for daily functioning, and that short sleep (less than 6 hours a night), can weaken a wide spectre of cognitive functions including the performance and care of mental wellbeing.

The nature of policing stress highlights this issue, specifically within frequent shift changes, which typically follows the pattern of two morning shift, two afternoon shifts and then two-night shifts. In his recent work, Violanti et. al, (2021) develops that frequent shift changes and irregular hours disrupt circadian rhythms, leading to sleep deprivation and enhancing mental health challenges, thus proving why combative wellbeing techniques should be utilised.

A survey by Evensen et al. (2019) revealed that many officers fear stigma and career repercussions if they seek psychological help, perpetuating cycles of untreated stress and anxiety, which seems to debate the argument that officers are open to readily available support. Specifically, this argument and research contradicts the findings by Abramson et. al (2021), who states that serving police officers within the UK are by majority, open to co-operating with existing psychologist/ mental health support networks.

While individual wellbeing is important, the challenges of operational policing also influence group dynamics and organisational culture due to often working with teams. More specifically, Papazoglou and Tuttle (2018) suggest that high levels of stress among officers contribute to a phenomenon known as 'emotional contagion'. This emotional contagion is where negative emotions are spread across teams, impacting one person to another, breaking down personal morale and group cohesion. This effect is specifically highlighted when dealing with high-pressure situations, or traumatic events with all attending parties feeling a negative impact on their personal wellbeing, and once again, team cohesion. This research from Papazoglou and Tuttle (2018) suggests that balanced team cohesion and a positive view on the situation is essential in combatting personal wellbeing issues.

Additional research from Brough et al. (2019) suggests that group wellbeing is further undermined by organisational factors, such as inadequate leadership and a lack of psychological safety. To back up this, Brough et al. (2019) argue that unsupportive organisational cultures, in this case the police force, greatly increases stress levels and fosters officer disengagement, leading to high staff turnover and reduced trust in management. Despite this argument, Hu et al, (2020) argues that departments that prioritise mental health cultivate stronger, more personal bonds with staff/officers and a collective resilience, enabling teams to handle stress more effectively, clearly displaying the more positive arguments in relation to the management of mental wellbeing, specifically in a team-working dynamic.

Analysing the sources involved and researched, it becomes clear that the importance of managing mental wellbeing in policing cannot be overstated, and that failure to address mental health issues not only endangers officers' lives but also compromises public safety and organisational efficiency. Additionally, mental health management strategies have garnered increasing attention in recent years, with evidence-based interventions demonstrating positive outcomes.

McCraty and Atkinson's (2019) research suggests that resilience training has been shown to improve officers' ability to cope with stress and reduce the prevalence of mental health disorders, whilst stating that resilience programmes incorporating mindfulness and cognitive techniques enhanced emotional regulation and job

satisfaction among officers. While effective, Papazoglou & Andersen's (2019) research still debates that resilience training alone may shift the burden of mental health onto individuals, neglecting work-related issues such as workload and organisational culture .

In both the United Kingdom and worldwide, policing involves physical demands that can significantly impact officers' health and wellbeing (Foley and Massey, 2020). Houdmont et.al (2021) suggest that extended shifts, irregular sleep patterns, and the physical demands of the job can result in chronic fatigue, and cardiovascular issues, where wellbeing management, including fitness initiatives and health monitoring, can mitigate these risks and enhance officers' readiness for duty. Moreover, according to the College of Policing (2021), high workloads and staff shortages greatly increase individual officer and team stress and health issues, and that the UK has faced a reduction in police numbers in recent years, placing greater pressure on the remaining workforce. Following this, the College of Policing further suggests that ensuring manageable workloads through strategic staffing and rest policies is essential to prevent burnout and maintain operational effectiveness. This suggestion by College of Policing is further backed up with previous research by Charman (2020), who also states that the introduction of wellbeing-focused shift patterns, such as the pilot schemes tested in several UK forces, has shown promise in reducing fatigue and improving work-life balance. These adjustments underline the importance of aligning operational demands with officers' physical needs, also outlining the potential strategies in place for benefiting mental wellbeing needs.

Ricciardelli et. al (2020) states that peer support networks are another widely endorsed strategy from policing organisations, highlighting that officers are more likely to seek help from colleagues who understand the unique challenges of the profession. These networks are aimed at reducing stigma and fostering an environment of trust, enabling officers to share unique and commonly known negative experiences and access support. However, research conducted by Mikołajczak-Degrauwe et. al (2023) suggests that peer support networks do not always work within the workplace. More specifically, Mikołajczak-Degrauwe et. al (2023) states that staff often tend to avoid or not engage with work-based peer support networks due to a variety of different reasons, such as having a lack of spare time, or avoiding due to the stigma around speaking on wellbeing issues. This source becomes highly credible when referencing within the police due to the lack of time following the various shift patterns serving officers face.

Despite this, Nash, J. (2024) backs the argument that peer support networks are necessary when it comes to highlighting officer wellbeing as workforces having peer support networks works with aiding mental wellbeing by promoting a sense of belonging and eliminating the stigma when it comes to accessing peer support networks. However, this may only be done if the officer themselves are willing to co-operate in the first place. Ease of access to professional mental health services is a cornerstone of effective wellbeing management within policing A study by Weiss et al. (2020) demonstrated that workforce based psychological support teams significantly reduced PTSD symptoms among officers, particularly when services were tailored to the unique demands of policing, whilst nonetheless, barriers such as

costs for services and confidentiality concerns remain significant challenges to widespread implementation.

Effective mental health management is not only a matter of individual welfare but also a determinant of organisational and operational success. Poor mental health undermines decision-making, increases absenteeism, and contributes to errors that can have serious consequences for public safety (Andersen et al., 2019).

Conversely, officers who receive adequate mental health support are more likely to exhibit resilience, maintain high performance levels, and build positive relationships with the community (McCreary et al., 2018).

The National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) (2022) have released their 2022-2025 model for their mental health and policing strategy, aiming at combatting issues around officers and mental wellbeing. The primary objective of the NPCC is to identify and set out good practice within policing in the United Kingdom, working alongside other agencies such as the college of policing. According to the NPCC, the importance of upholding officers' wellbeing is key both individual and team dynamics. This statement is then further backed up by Craddock and Telesco, (2021) who additionally state that long-term exposure to major/exposing incidents and traumatic events, within the scope of the duties of a law enforcement officer, have negative implications that can impact both their physical and mental wellbeing.

The long-term benefits of mental health interventions are evident in studies examining their impact on retention and job satisfaction, linking in where Brough et al. (2019) discovered that departments investing in mental wellbeing reported lower turnover rates and higher levels of employee engagement. These findings underscore the strategic importance of mental health management as a means of enhancing operational effectiveness and organisational stability.

Overall, operational policing poses significant challenges to individual and group wellbeing, driven by exposure to trauma, chronic stress, and organisational factors. The built-up impact of these stressors displays itself in high rates of mental health issues, reduced group cohesion, and strained police-community relations. The work of McCreary et. al (2018) in particular, has highlighted the importance of managing mental wellbeing in policing whilst maintaining a positive cohesive team relationship. Additionally, highlighting evidence-based strategies such as resilience training, peer support, and professional mental health service.

Addressing these challenges requires a more personal approach that integrates individual, organisational, and community-level initiatives. By prioritising mental health, police organisations can foster resilience, enhance performance, and strengthen their relationship with the communities they serve.

Word count - 1801

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Why is a partnership approach the most effective way to reach groups or communities who are less willing to engage with police? You should consider why certain groups are reluctant to engage with police, and the ways engagement can be achieved.

Your answer should be based on academic research, although you may make reference to relevant case studies.

In recent years, the relationship between police forces and communities in the United Kingdom has come under increasing scrutiny, particularly in areas where residents are reluctant to engage with police forces. Some research conducted by Murphy (2013) suggests that this reluctance often stems from historical grievances, negative interactions, and a perceived lack of understanding from police officers regarding the unique challenges faced by these communities. As a result, a partnership approach has been implemented, as a strategy to bridge the gap between hard-to-reach communities and the police. This approach focuses on collaboration and refers to the strategy where police forces work closely with members of the community, local organisations and other businesses in the community in an attempt to foster positive relationships and build trust within these communities. This essay aims to explore why some communities may be reluctant to engage with the police and discuss why a partnership approach may be an effective way to communicate with more reluctant members of the public, along with how engagement may be achieved.

Community reluctance to engage with police in the UK can be attributed to several factors. One of these factors is historical mistrust, particularly in communities that have experienced negative interactions with the police. For instance, the aftermath of high-profile incidents, such as the Stephen Lawrence case in the 1990s, highlighted issues of institutional racism within the police force, leading to long-lasting distrust among minority communities. It may be reasonable to suggest that these experiences have created tension between the police and ethnic minority groups, resulting in an increased distrust and reluctance to engage with policing initiatives (Murphy et al., 2018).

Additionally, there are concerns about the perceived lack of understanding from police regarding the unique challenges faced by different communities (Brown et al, 2002). Many residents feel that officers do not adequately represent or understand their backgrounds, cultures, or specific needs. This disconnect can lead to feelings of alienation and reluctance to cooperate.

Furthermore, it could be suggested that lower income neighbourhoods may feel reluctant to engage with police forces. One reason for this may be the perception of

police officers within these communities. For example, a study carried out by Webster (2021), suggests that there is a correlation between poverty and crime, resulting in a negative perception of the police, leading to reluctance to engage. This study suggested that despite efforts made by the police, young adults from more deprived areas of the UK, are more likely to have numerous police encounters of trauma, poor health and poverty, which have shaped the way they judged the roles and effectiveness of policing. In light of this, it appears that a partnership approach is necessary here, as young people from backgrounds such as these do not have a good perception of the police, hence the reluctance to engage (Webster, 2021).

Moreover, the portrayal of police in the media can also influence public perception. Negative coverage of police actions, especially in relation to issues like stop-and-search practices or protests, can exacerbate fears and reinforce the belief that police are not there to protect but to control. This results in a cycle of mistrust where communities feel they cannot rely on law enforcement for support or safety, leading to feelings of reluctance to engage. Overall, these factors contribute to a significant barrier to engagement, making it essential for police forces to adopt strategies that prioritise community involvement and genuine partnership.

As a result of many members of many different communities feeling reluctant to engage with police initiatives, a partnership approach was introduced. A partnership approach involves collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. This approach is designed to build trust, enhance communication, and foster mutual respect. It recognises that effective policing requires the active participation of community members in identifying and addressing public safety concerns (Home Office, 2016).

At its core, a partnership approach entails engaging with the community through regular dialogue, meetings, and outreach programs. Police officers work to understand the unique needs and challenges faced by different community groups, particularly those that may have historically experienced mistrust or negative interactions with law enforcement (Miller, 2020). This approach often includes joint initiatives aimed at crime prevention, community safety, and youth engagement. By involving residents in decision-making processes and encouraging their input, police can create tailored strategies that reflect the community's priorities (Crawford, 2006).

Moreover, a partnership approach can help bridge the gap between law enforcement and citizens, leading to more effective policing outcomes. It emphasises transparency and accountability, ensuring that police actions align with community expectations and fostering a sense of ownership among residents regarding their safety and well-being (Bennett, 2017). This partnership approach is grounded in many core principles, helping to improve cohesion between the police and reluctant communities. Of course, collaboration is fundamental, as it involves police working together with community members and local organisations to address public safety issues, ensuring that this joint effort fosters a shared sense of responsibility and encourages active participation from residents (Bennett, 2017).

Transparency is another key principle, as it helps build trust between law enforcement and the community. By being open about their actions and decision-making processes, police can demonstrate accountability, which is essential for earning public confidence (Miller, 2020). One way this has been implemented in policing in the UK is the introduction of independent advisory groups (IAGs). An IAG refers to a group of community members coming together to share opinions and feedback on policing practices and policies in place. These groups are useful as they ensure that members of diverse backgrounds are able to openly share their previous experiences, used to shape their opinions on the police. This initiative also demonstrates the effectiveness of community engagement and transparency when engaging with reluctant communities within society (Wiltshire Police, 2022).

Finally, community involvement is crucial for the effectiveness of this approach. It emphasises the need for residents to actively participate in discussions about safety and contribute to solutions. Engaging diverse voices, especially from marginalised groups, ensures that policing strategies reflect the community's needs and priorities (Crawford, 2006).

Moreover, building trust through partnerships in policing is essential for creating a safe and supportive environment within communities. Trust is the cornerstone of effective law enforcement; without it, police efforts can be met with scepticism, resistance, and even hostility. A partnership approach fosters trust by encouraging open communication, shared decision-making, and mutual respect between law enforcement and community members.

According to Hanway and Hambly (2023), one of the most pressing ways officers can build trust with communities is through transparency, specifically based on the modern-day concept of 'policing by consent'. Additionally, Hanway and Hambly further suggest that it is crucial that police forces are open about their policies, procedures, and the challenges they face, as it helps clarify and make clear all ongoing law enforcement practices. Regular community meetings, public forums, and social media updates can provide platforms for police to share information and gather feedback. For example, efforts made by South Wales Police This transparency allows community members to feel informed and included in the policing process, which can significantly enhance their trust in law enforcement. According to a 2023 study published in the *Journal of Criminal Justice*, transparency in policing practices leads to increased community satisfaction and a reduction in crime rates (Smith et al., 2023).

Additionally, involving community members in the decision-making process is crucial. When residents have a say in how their neighbourhoods are policed, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their safety. This can take the form of community advisory boards or collaborative problem-solving initiatives, where police and residents work together to identify issues and develop strategies. Such involvement not only empowers citizens but also helps police better understand the unique needs and concerns of different neighbourhoods. A report from the National Institute of Justice in 2022 highlighted that community engagement

initiatives significantly improve trust and cooperation between police and communities (Johnson, 2022).

Furthermore, building personal relationships between police officers and community members can significantly enhance trust. Officers who engage with residents in non-enforcement contexts, such as community events or youth programs, can break down barriers and foster positive interactions. These relationships desensitise law enforcement and create an environment where community members feel comfortable approaching officers with concerns or information. A 2023 survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre found that communities with strong police-community relationships report higher levels of trust and cooperation (Pew Research Centre, 2023). Moreover, training police officers in cultural competence and community engagement can also play a pivotal role in building trust. Officers who understand the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the communities they serve are better equipped to communicate effectively and respond appropriately to various situations. This understanding can reduce misunderstandings and conflicts, further enhancing the trust between police and community members.

Overall, building trust through partnerships in policing requires a commitment to transparency, community involvement, and personal relationships. By fostering an environment of open communication and mutual respect, law enforcement agencies can create stronger, safer communities where residents feel valued and supported. This partnership approach not only enhances public safety but also strengthens the fabric of community life, paving the way for a more collaborative future.

Over the years, there have been numerous partnership initiatives that have successfully built trust between the police and reluctant communities. Firstly, many police forces in the UK, including South Wales Police have implemented community support officers (PCSOs). Primarily, the role of a PCSO is to provide a link between the community and the police. One way this has been achieved is PCSOs attending community events held by communities that may be more difficult to engage with, in an attempt to foster trusting communication. Also, South Wales Police's PCSOs hold regular local meetings in the local community, such as community centres and supermarkets. These sessions are an informal drop in, where members of the community can discuss any concerns and ideas they may have (College of Policing, 2020).

Finally, South Wales Police recognised that some ethnic minority communities were, and continue to be, underrepresented in South Wales Police. Research conducted by a group of researchers concluded that many ethnic minorities feel as though there is a racial bias within police forces across the UK, imbedding a reluctance to apply to work within the police (Waters et al., 2007). As a result of this, numerous police forces, including South Wales Police, implemented a partnership initiative known as 'Positive Action', which refers to a action taken under the Equality Act 2010, which aims to recruit officers from ethnic minority backgrounds. One way this is done is by providing applicants from Black and Ethnic minority groups with additional support during the application process (South Wales Police, 2023).

In conclusion, research seems to point towards partnership approaches having a positive impact on police- community relationships. The partnership approach, which emphasises collaboration, transparency, and community involvement, has emerged as an effective strategy for overcoming these challenges. By working closely with community members, police forces can build trust, foster open communication, and ensure that policing strategies align with the needs and concerns of residents. Initiatives such as independent advisory groups, community support officers, and positive action recruitment are vital steps towards bridging the gap between law enforcement and marginalized groups. Ultimately, a partnership approach not only improves public safety but also strengthens the social fabric of communities, paving the way for a more inclusive and effective policing model in the future.

Word count - 1906

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