

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will be looking at the research methods that will be used by the researcher to best achieve the research objectives. These are:

- To investigate how officers cope with operational and organisational stressors.
- To determine how long officers have been in the role of a response officer.
- To determine the types of incidents response officers attend.
- To analyse the number of officers considering leaving response for another department

Following the review of existing literature, there are gaps within the research when looking specifically at response officers and their mental health, as well as the retention of police officers and the direct link with mental health.

3.2 Research Strategy

This research is going to be conducted using a questionnaire. This allows for the collection of information with the intention of exploring the perceptions and experiences of the research participants (Thomas et al., 2010). Rhind et al. (2014, p. 111) state that questionnaires are used for exploratory or descriptive research. The researcher of this project is exploring how those officers working within the role of a response officer are coping with their mental health, and subsequently if mental health is having a direct impact on the retention rates of those in that role.

When looking at a research strategy, the researcher did consider the use of interviews rather than a questionnaire when conducting this project. Interviews allow for the researcher to ask probing questions and to get to know the participants personally (Jain, 2021). However, interviews are quite time consuming and may increase reluctance in individuals to participate due to lack of anonymity (Alsaawi, 2014). Therefore, the researcher will be utilising a questionnaire to conduct this research.

This research is targeted at those who work in the area of response policing and specifically those at the ranks of constable, sergeant, and inspector within South Wales Police. This target sample has been selected by the researcher as they are able to easily disseminate the survey to those meeting the criteria using internal email / intranet avenues. The target sample size has been obtained from the Human Resources Department who have provided the total number of officers meeting this criterion as 1156. This sample target will allow for future research to be conducted in other forces with a similar sample size for comparison.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

This research will mainly consist of quantitative data, compiled from closed questions with multiple-choice answers. A benefit of obtaining quantitative data is that it can “be used to establish generalizable fact about a topic” (Streefkerk, 2023). Quantitative data will be presented in the use of graphs which allows for efficient comparison between answers provided by participants. Statistical analysis will be utilised when analysing this data to present it in the proper manner. The analysis will be conducted using Google Data Studio due to its easy operability, as well as the ability to restrict access to other users, allowing only the researcher and supervisor to access the relevant information (Sinha, 2020). There are also no additional costs when using this programme as it is free to use.

There will also be a small proportion of qualitative data obtained from the survey, through the use of open-ended questions, where the participant can expand upon their answers as much as they wish. A benefit of obtaining qualitative data is that it allows researchers to understand how people are effected by events, and how their attitudes and opinions are formed (Agius, 2018). Qualitative data will be presented by the use of themes, linking directly to the research objectives. Extracts from the answers provided by participants will be included to show how these themes are being experienced.

The researcher has chosen to utilise both quantitative and qualitative data for the above reasons and by combining both data sets, the research will show a better understanding of the research objectives set out at the beginning of the project.

3.4 Limitations and Potential Problems

The researcher aims to reduce the limitation of data collection by providing the questionnaire to the intended sample group via the internal email system, as well as posting it on the internal intranet used by officers within South Wales Police. However, not all of those within the intended sample population may have access to these systems during the time the questionnaire is live. This could be for a range of reasons like being away from work on annual leave, sickness, and also focusing on their job role.

The researcher does not believe that COVID-19 will be a problem with this research as officers are still able to be in work should they test positive or are working from home – with access to their work devices.

A limitation with this research is that officers may not feel comfortable disclosing personal experiences due to risk of losing anonymity through their answers. This is common in policing as noted by Demou et al in 2020 that the stigma associated with mental health is high and prevents officers from disclosing how they are feeling and what their experiences are. Participation within this research will be entirely voluntary and the participants are able to answer the open-ended questions in as much or as little detail as they wish. The data collected through this research project will comply with the General Data Protection Regulations and be stored on a computer with two-factor authentication.

3.5 Summary of Chapter

Within this chapter, the researcher sets out the research strategy, the collection and analysis of data, and the limitations and problems that may occur during this project. This research shall be conducted utilising a questionnaire with open and closed questions, allowing for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative data will be collected from the responses received and inputted into Google Data Studio for the production of graphs so the data can easily be interpreted. The qualitative data will be collated, and extracts taken which highlight themes between response.

It is clear that there are a small number of limitations to this research which the researcher will look to manage effectively to allow for a suitable sample of answers and for participants to feel reassured when answering the given questions.

Word Count – 1,006

3.6 Bibliography

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