

## Chapter Two – Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review will provide an analysis of the key literature surrounding the topic of the impact of austerity measures on police officer wellbeing. This chapter will examine the broader implications of austerity on society before narrowing the focus of the research on the impact that is felt by emergency and public services. The focus of the review will then further narrow to analyse the specific impacts that austerity has had on policing such as a reduction in resources, increased workloads and decreased job satisfaction and how this has impacted police officer wellbeing. Finally, this chapter will evaluate what provisions are currently in place to mitigate the impact of austerity on police officers' wellbeing and it will aim to address objective one of the dissertation which is the following:

*To review the current available research to understand the effects austerity measures has had on emergency and public services and its subsequent impact on police officer wellbeing.*

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, austerity measures became a popular fiscal tool used by many countries to varying degrees (McCartney, 2015). Austerity is defined as a voluntary deflation in which the economy is adjusted through reduction in wages, prices and public spending which is designed to restore competitiveness in the market, thus in theory improving economic viability and conditions (Blyth, 2013).

Austerity measures are typically implemented to reduce public sector expenditure by implementing a series of cuts to public sector funding, freezing of public sector pay and tax increases. However, the efficacy of austerity policies is a topic of polarisation. Whilst critics argue that austerity fails to achieve economic growth and leads to a dismantling of social systems (Cooper & Whyte, 2017; Calcagno, 2012), advocates suggest austerity can work when the economy is in a boom period, and its effectiveness relies on contextual factors (Jayadev & Konczal, 2010; Monastiriotis, 2014).

The consequential impact of austerity on law enforcement has been substantial and has impacted police officers throughout the country. Policing is already a stressful vocation as officers have to contend with traumatic situations, risk of physical harm, and a requirement to fulfil many diverse roles (Reese, 1986). With cuts to law enforcement funding leading to fewer resources, less staff and increased workloads, questions have been raised as to the impact that austerity measures have had on police officer wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a complicated concept that lacks a universally accepted definition. One of the earliest definitions of wellbeing referred to the absence of disease (Scaria, 2020), however the concept of wellbeing has since evolved over time and it is now generally defined as a positive sense of life satisfaction and a state of equilibrium that is desired by all humans (Jawad, Scott-Jackson, 2016; Böhnke, Kohler, 2010; Dodge et al., 2012). Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept, and it encompasses physical, social, environmental and mental factors (Keifer, 2008). Research in this area indicates that a person's subjective wellbeing is significantly influenced by work

related factors such as work environment, and employee characteristics, and they have the potential to spill over from work into family life (Ford et al., 2018; Sirgy, 2021).

## **2.2 The societal impact of austerity**

The societal impacts of austerity are far reaching and wide ranging. The research in this area indicates that the UK is not an outlier in terms of societal suffering as a result of austerity measures. Research from (Serapioni, Hespanha, 2019) found that austerity measures which have been implemented in southern Europe have led to increased unemployment, a decrease in GDP and a decline in public services such as health and social care which disproportionately affects the most vulnerable in society. Further research by Schipper, Schonig, (2016) revealed that post financial crisis austerity measures implemented in Europe have led to a degradation in access to healthcare in the majority of countries in the EU-28 zone. The European countries that implemented more severe austerity measures have seen an increase in low birth weights and an increase in material deprivation (Rajmil et al., 2018). The economic stagnation and negative health outcomes experienced by European countries in the age of austerity is in stark contrast to the economic growth experienced by the US who took a different approach to the financial crash in the form of economic stimulus (Mckee, 2012).

On October 20th, 2010, The UK Government released the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). This document outlined the government's plans to cut central government funding for public services, including funding grants for the 43 police

forces in England and Wales, which resulted in a 20% real terms cut to police budgets (HM Treasury, 2010).

The UK coalition government implemented the series of austerity measures in a bid to shrink the budget deficit which had exponentially risen due to financial sector bailouts after the global financial crisis in 2008 (Stuckler et al., 2017). The measures aimed to reduce the deficit by increasing taxes and cutting public spending. In the period prior to the 2010 general election, the leader of the Conservative party and soon to be newly elected prime minister David Cameron utilised the term austerity to signify and represent a new age of fiscal responsibility. During a 2009 speech David Cameron declared that “The age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity” and promised to implement a “culture of thrift” in order to address the budget deficit (Independent, 2009). Although initial support for austerity was generally favourable, public sentiment has shifted significantly over time. A 2017 Ipsos poll found that 33% of the public had felt directly impacted by austerity measures, which was an increase from 23% in 2015 (Ipsos, 2017). A further Ipsos survey conducted in 2024 found that 73% of Britons believed that UK government policies had directly contributed to the rising cost of living (Ipsos, 2024).

Although the economic benefit of austerity and its impact is argued amongst academics (Clarke, Newman, 2012) Research suggests that austerity measures have a more profound impact on vulnerable individuals in the most economically deprived areas, and leads to increased unemployment, deprivation and homelessness (Mettheys et al., 2018; Struckler et al., 2017; Pomati, 2020). During times of austerity, communities not only face the financial strain that accompany the

policies, but they also have to deal with the consequences that austerity measures subsequently have on their physical and mental health (Cooper & Whyte, 2017).

Specifically, from the perspective of the UK, the negative impacts of the so called “age of austerity” have been significant and sustained. Austerity has impacted Britons in almost every possible metric whereby their standard of living can be negatively influenced. From an economic perspective, it does not appear that the measures have had the desired impact. Welfare reform and other such austerity policies have consistently correlated with increased use of foodbanks in the UK (Jenkins et al., 2021) and has led to economic stagnation (Mckee et al., 2012).

Although the policies implemented by the government, were intended to be gender neutral, studies suggest that the policies have disproportionately affected women. Changes to universal credit and cuts to public sector employment and public services have increased the poverty gap between men and women (Macdonald, 2018). Although women have been more negatively impacted by austerity from an economic perspective; men have been disproportionately impacted from a healthcare standpoint with statistics indicating that men have seen an increase in mortality rates compared to women in the years following austerity (Walsh et al., 2022).

Austerity has also had a significantly negative impact on health and social care. Research indicates that cuts to healthcare services have directly resulted in reduced access, and increased health inequality (Hespanha, Serapioni, 2019; Labonté, Ruckert, 2017). The policies have also led to changes in the functionality of certain vital departments of healthcare. Kerasidou, Kingori., (2019) study into the impact of austerity on Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments found that the patient

demographic in A&E had substantially changed, during the years following the 2010 budget review. The study found that A&E had moved away from its true meaning and function as an accident and emergency department and had veered towards a culture of “anything and everything” due to the increase in demand and degradation of community care. Traditional healthcare is not the only facet which has seen a negative impact; as mental health provisions and services have also been dramatically affected (Cummins, 2018). The lack of funding for mental health services has seen a degradation in mental health outcomes (Mattheys, 2015). The societal impact of austerity is particularly relevant to policing as many studies have concluded that socio economic factors such as deprivation, income inequality, and unemployment are strongly associated with increased crime rates (Livingston et al., 2014; Tarling, Dennis, 2016; Wu & Wu, 2012).

### **2.3 Policing in the age of austerity**

Austerity has undeniably had an impact on how the police have operated since the measures were implemented and has led to compromises in how the police have been able to fulfil their core role of protecting the public. Millie (2013) comprehensive research into the topic of policing post austerity identified that the effects of austerity on the police have been significant. Millie, (2013) argued that a new policing landscape of fewer resources and increased accountability has led to uncertainty for police officers. Laub (2024) recent paper on the effects of austerity on policing identified that the police in England and Wales have seemingly assumed increased responsibility for important social and welfare roles, which are not traditionally attributed to police. Laub (2024) argues that despite the police suffering significant

budget cuts, they have continued to take on more responsibility and subsequent workload, supplementing struggling public institutions due to the police being an institution of last resort. This research is corroborated by Cummings, (2023) who found that due to austerity measures and public services retrenchment, Police are now becoming the first responders to mental health calls.

Funding cuts to police have also had a detrimental impact on the public's confidence in policing which is a fundamental foundational pillar of policing in the UK. Austerity cuts to police budgets which resulted in the closure of a staggering 70% of police stations in England and Wales has led to a significant and persistent increase in violent crime due to less police visibility and lower deterrence (Facchetti, 2021; Giuletti, McConnell, 2020). The communities and localities that were most affected by welfare reform also experienced the biggest increase in crime, with poorer areas bearing the brunt of the impacts from the measures (Giuletti, McConnell, 2020). Statistics show that for every £100 cut from welfare payments per working adult, there was a 5-6% increase in racially and religiously motivated crimes between 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 (Bray et al., 2022). This research implies that Austerity has had an intricate impact on both crime rates and the concentration of crime; as well as contributing to the exacerbation of hate crimes, which have historically contributed to widening inequality and prejudice.

Austerity cuts to police budgets has led to a dramatic depletion in police resources and has led to a reduction in frontline officers (Ellison, Brogden, 2013). This reduction in resources has led to concerns that policing has moved away from

neighbourhood proactivity and swayed towards a reactive mindset (Greig-Midlane, 2019) which can have a detrimental impact on public confidence.

Public confidence is a term that is widely used as the key indicator of trust, legitimacy in policing; and it is this measure of the public's confidence which informs how successful policing is in the UK (Merry et al, 2012). There is a significant amount of research to suggest that public visibility and feeling informed about policing activities has a positive impact on the public's confidence in policing (Sindall, Sturgis, 2013; Bradford et al, 2009; Yesberg et al, 2023). As the police have experienced cuts to their budgets, they have had to achieve more with less. This extra demand can lead to a further erosion of public confidence due to expectation from the public becoming more difficult to meet as well as a degradation in police officer wellbeing.

#### **2.4 The impact of austerity on officer welfare**

Austerity measures have had a significant impact on officer and staff wellbeing since their implementation in 2010. Current research suggests that many of the issues and impact factors that contribute to poor physical and mental wellbeing amongst police officers have been exacerbated by austerity.

The 20% real terms cut to police budgets led to a reduction in the workforce and an elevated workload for those who remained which has negatively impacted their wellbeing (The Guardian, 2019). This observation has particularly affected those

working in the area of sex offender management and public protection (Mann et al., 2018).

The most recently published survey conducted by the Police Federation (POLFED) also paints a grim picture when it comes to police officer morale and wellbeing. In a 2023 survey of over 29,000 police officers, 22% of officers expressed intentions of resigning within the next two years with the key factors being low morale (85%) and poor mental health and wellbeing (73%) (Police Federation, 2024). The survey also found that 86% of officers felt that their department did not have enough officers to meet the demand placed on them and 64% stated that their workload has been 'too high' or 'much too high' over the previous 12 months. The sample size of this survey equates to roughly 20% of police officers currently employed in the UK, which is a reliable sample size for quantitative research and would accurately represent the general feeling amongst officers in the UK.

Police are now attending more mental health incidents in the wake of diminished social and welfare services which has resulted in officer disillusion and decreased job satisfaction (Lumsden, Black, 2020). Cuts to police budgets have also led to a reduction in police training (Bell, Elski, 2016) which when coupled with the widening scope of police work, has inevitably led to officers being ill equipped and undertrained to deal with issues which have not traditionally been in the remit of police (Lane, 2019).

## **2.5. Provisions for officer welfare**

There are some provisions in place nationally for police officers designed to positively impact wellbeing such as The National Police Wellbeing Service known as Oscar Kilo which offers 24/7 mental health crisis support line for police officers and staff (College of policing, 2024; Police Federation 2024). Support is also offered regionally by forces. Gwent Police utilise a process known as TRiM (Trauma Risk Incident Management) which is a process which is designed to support officers and staff who have been exposed to traumatic incidents. Gwent Police also have a Wellbeing Annual Strategy which aims to enhance the understanding of support resources for police officers and staff (Gwent Police, 2024). There is also a culture in policing whereby officers find it difficult to discuss their own psychological issues (Bell, Elski, 2016) however research indicates that resilience training can equip officers with the tools required to help them manage the challenges they face (Hesketh et al., 2015).

## **2.6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the literature highlights that austerity has had a profound impact on police officer wellbeing. The austerity led reductions in police budgets, workforce resources, and support provisions coupled with increased workloads have led to stress, burnout and decreased job satisfaction from police officers. Despite being a vocation of high stress and trauma, studies have demonstrated an erosion of support and a lack of mental health provisions for officers, as well as an increasing disparity between the operational expectation of the police and the resources available to

meet the demand. The impacts of austerity have not only affected individual police officers, but they have had a significant impact on organisational morale and efficacy, and the consequences of the measures has contributed to the erosion of public trust and confidence in the police. Although there are some coping and resilience strategies for police officers, the latest survey and figures suggest that they are not sufficient, and they do not address the underlying issues. The research indicates that there is a fundamental requirement for a re-evaluation of public spending to ensure that police officers wellbeing is maintained and that police forces are adequately funded and resourced to meet the ever evolving and expanding demands on the service.