

Findings chapter

Introductions

The dissertation is coming to a near conclusion and has so far gone through the introduction, literature review, research chapter and analysis. The objectives of this chapter are to compare the literature reviewed and analysis findings from the previous chapters to end the dissertation with its recommendations. This chapter will also provide the conclusion to the main research objectives as well as indicate the limitations observed when completing the dissertation.

Findings

The main question of if Police officers and staff have dealt with as a part of their role a critical or major incident and suffered from adverse mental health problems was answered. The definition of critical and major incidents was covered within the literature review as well as what constitutes to a mental health problem. Within the dissertation questionnaire, 88% of participants have agreed to attending a critical or major incident as a part of their role. Out of all participants, 66% of the participants have agreed that following attending a critical or major incident that they have suffered adverse mental health effects.

The second question put within this dissertation was if following attending a critical or major incident any mental health support had been offered and if it was helpful, was then answered. Within the literature review Sutton and Polaschek (2022) wrote that a tertiary intervention to a critical incident is a peer reviewed assessment, within the UK known as a Trauma Risk Management (TRIM) assessment. All participants that have attended critical or major incidents have been offered a TRIM referral assessment following the incident. Of all participants within the questionnaire only 24% had sought mental health support following attending a critical or major incident, even though more had suffered with adverse mental health problem. Of those who took a TRIM referral 25% answered that the process was helpful with dealing with trauma and stress, with the remaining answering either it was not helpful or they preferred not to say.

The final question put within this dissertation, what Police officers and staff believe is the main cause of mental health issues within the police force was then answered. From the literature review it was found by Purba and Demou (2019) that Police Officers do not only deal with stressful situations within incidents but also have organisational stressors, such as lack of support, heavy work loads and lack of resources. This correlates with the findings of the research questionnaire in finding that 76% of the participants believed that mental health issues arise in Police offices and staff regardless of attending traumatic incidents. Most participants highlighted high workloads that cause adverse mental health issues within officers and staff.

Recommendations

The recommendations that come from this dissertation are not sought from any mental health care professionals but come from comparing the literature reviewed and the answers obtained within the dissertation questionnaire. Velazquez and Hernandez (2019) identified in the literature review that within the policing culture officers still advocate a negative attitude towards seeking mental health support based on organisational stigma. This can be observed when looking at the questionnaire results. All officers who had attended a critical or major incident had been offered a TRIM referral by Gwent Police, However only 33% of participants have taken TRIM referrals offered to them. Less than 27% of participants believe it is easy to access mental health support within Gwent Police. Only 36% of participants would feel comfortable confiding in a supervisor for support.

From the literature reviewed and the answers received within the questionnaire it is evident that Gwent Police have attempted to mitigate any mental health problems within its officers and staff by offering TRIM referrals to all who have attended a critical or major incident. The problem there lies with participants who do not feel comfortable in confiding in mental health practitioners or colleagues for support. Then what can be done?

Recommendation 1

The narrative seems to be that a TRIM referral is offered immediately after officers or staff attend a critical or major incident. However from the literature reviewed it is highlighted that adverse mental health problems may not show immediately after the first attendance of the incident and could take months or years to show. A recommendation for this problem could be that Gwent Police keep a record of those who have said no to a TRIM referral and follow up within a few months of the incident to see if any change has occurred within that officer.

Recommendation 2

Another recommendation would be for the Senior Management Teams (SMT) within Gwent police to reevaluate how workloads of officers are looked after. From the literature reviewed and the answers gained within the questionnaire, officers and staff feel the main contributor to mental health issues would be the high workloads all officers seem to carry. The SMT need to address these problems as it seems that officers and staff leave the police early, not due to attending traumatic incidents but due to the high and unrealistic workloads that officers and staff are expected to keep. A way to combat this would be to offer staff and officers a rotation of working days in which they can combat their high workloads without fearing being called into other duties.

Recommendation 3

A final recommendation would be that police officers and staff can assess for themselves when they feel that their mental health has deteriorated and should seek out support when it is needed, not directly after a critical or major incident, when a TRIM referral is initially given. Support may be more easily accessible if officers and staff know when to ask for it themselves. A simple conversation with a colleague, supervisor or mental health practitioner may be enough to guide police officers and staff to the appropriate care they need.

Limitations

Limitation 1

Although the findings within this dissertation often marry to the literature that has been reviewed, there is a limitation to this dissertation and its results. The focus group used, revolved around one

specific shift working within Gwent Police which contains around 50 persons. The limitation of this would be that most officers would have attended the same incidents, working on the same shift. Further research could be conducted by opening the questionnaire to other shifts or force areas to offer a variety of responses.

Limitation 2

Another limitation was the research subject itself. As the literature review and findings suggest, there is still a stigma around mental health and police officers. Although no personal questions relating to individuals' mental health or their identity was asked, it is still a subject that some may not wish to be open about. This was observed within the questionnaire with multiple participants opting to reply "prefer not to say" to yes or no answers regarding mental health.

Limitation 3

A further limitation was that from the literature reviewed, adverse mental health issues arise within officers and staff occur in officers with prolonged periods of service. The study group used within this dissertation for the majority had a service of less than five years, which may not allow for a long enough length of service for mental health issues to have taken place.

Future research

From the literature review and questionnaire, it is unclear why there is still a stigma around police officers and staff taking mental health support. Although this dissertation revolves around critical and major incidents effects on mental health it has opened up more questions for further research. Further research can be done to identify why a stigma is still so prevalent in officers and staff, in a day and age where mental health and self-care is such a vocal point in today's society. The further research can aim to identify as highlighted within the literature review and this dissertation questionnaire, why police officers and staff still hold a stigma around mental health support, even when the support is offered to them. The dissertation has also opened research opportunities into why police officers and staff carry such high work load. The questionnaire has identified that most officers and staff do not see traumatic incidents as a main cause of mental health issues, but have indicated that it is the workloads they carry that causes the most mental health deterioration.

Conclusion

This dissertation has provided insights around the issues of growing mental health problems within police officers and staff following critical or major incidents, as well as what officers and staff believe the real cause of their mental health issues are. The project objectives have all been answered herein. The main goal was to identify if police officers and staff took mental health support offered to them following a critical or major incident. It was identified that police officers and staff took the support offered to them, but don't seek mental health support unless it is offered. The conclusion of the dissertation has found that police officers and staff do suffer adverse mental health issues the longer they serve. However it was mostly found that police officers and staff feel that their mental health deteriorates from high work loads and not through observing traumatic incidents. To

conclude it is clear that the longer a police officers length of service there would likely be some adverse mental health issues, however there is no clear indicator to what causes mental health issues and may be an accumulation of multiple factors.

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