

Chapter Five – Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This research explored the perceived impact of austerity measures on police officers' wellbeing in the United Kingdom. The research aimed to assess how reductions in public spending, organisational restructuring and increased workload have influenced the psychological, physical and emotional wellbeing of police officers.

The study utilised a qualitative approach through the use of three semi structured interviews with three police officers of escalating ranks who had served before, during and after the introduction of austerity measures. These interviews provided first hand insight into how austerity has reshaped policing culture, operational demands and police officer wellbeing.

This chapter will evaluate the extend to which the research objectives were met, outline the main findings, makes recommendations, acknowledges limitations suggesting areas for future research and presents the final conclusion.

5.2 Completion and achievement of objectives

This dissertation was guided by four core objectives:

- 1. 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.*

This objective was achieved through a comprehensive review of the current literature which identified recurring themes such as increased demand, resource limitations, increased occupational stress and reduced officer morale. Existing research identified a clear link between austerity measures and reduced efficiency of public services and increased workload and strain on those working within the sector. The

current available research established a clear theoretical framework in which to compare the collected data.

2. *To select appropriate research methods to understand the perceived effects austerity measures has had on Police resources, workplace conditions, and the subsequent perceived impact on officer wellbeing.*

This objective was achieved by selecting a qualitative methodology by conducting semi structured interviews with three police officers of escalating ranks (Constable, Sergeant, Inspector). This allowed for in depth exploration of personal lived experiences through the pre, during and post austerity period, and provided insights into both shared and rank specific challenges and stressors.

3. *To analyse the data collected to understand the relationship between austerity measures and the perceived impact of them on police officer wellbeing and job satisfaction.*

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts identified several recurring themes. The core identified themes included increased workload pressures, reduced staffing, limited access to wellbeing support, increased public and media scrutiny and increased assumption of responsibility for other public sector workload such as increased mental health responsibility.

4. *If required, to provide recommendations regarding the relationship between austerity measures and their perceived impact on police officer wellbeing.*

Based on the evidence and data collected, recommendations have been made to address both structural and cultural issues impacting officer wellbeing. These recommendations are presented later in this chapter.

The four research objectives have been addressed, producing research that connects the theoretical perspectives from the existing literature with the lived realities of policing in the age of austerity.

5.3 Main findings

Many of the findings of this research reflect the currently available literature analysed in Chapter two.

Austerity driven staff reductions have intensified workloads across all ranks in policing. This has resulted in higher occupational stress levels and decreased work life balance and reduced morale. Nisya' & Raharjo (2024) found that there is a significantly negative correlation between workload and work life balance which supports the indication that higher workloads substantially deteriorate officers' ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities.

Officers reported elevated stress and heightened anxiety regarding public perception and frustration that they had taken on more responsibility from similarly impacted public services. This findings reflect research from Lumsden and Black (2020) who found that police officer wellbeing is particularly impacted by emotional dissonance regarding their roles and increased stress related to frontline work and partner agency related challenges.

Participants consistently highlighted the loss of experienced officers due to austerity induced voluntary redundancy programmes as a key issue within modern policing due to new officers requiring more supervision, and a perception that they are less resilient and more likely to miss work due to stress or leave the force altogether.

Finally, officers highlighted a lack of adequate wellbeing support, with officers perceiving that their wellbeing was being managed just enough for them to carry out their duties rather than being a genuine intentional priority.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of these findings the following recommendations are proposed.

1. Introduction of preventative wellbeing interventions

Forces should introduce regular mental health check ins with officers with a focus on early intervention and resilience building programmes to ensure that officers are able to cope with the demanding nature of the profession.

2. Address frontline understaffing where feasible

Where budgets allow, more primary focus should be placed on recruitment and retention in uniformed policing. This would allow for a reduction in excessive workloads and ensure operational sustainability.

3. Improve access to support services

Occupational health and counselling services should be far more readily available and accessible for officers. Access to these support mechanisms should be timely and streamlined.

4. Strengthen multi agency partnerships for health-related incidents

Due to the increasing demand from mental health call outs, police forces should formalise and expand multi-agency response models such as street triage schemes (HMICFRS, 2019) as well as further integration of Right Care, Right Person (UK Government, 2023). This will enable the police to focus on their primary role and ensure that mental health patients receive the appropriate care and response.

5.4 Limitations

There are several limitations that should be acknowledged. The primary limitation is the size and scope of the project. Due to the word count and time constraints associated with an undergraduate dissertation project, the parameters of the research have had to be narrowed and focused to a limited number of participants. This limits the ability to assume generalisations.

The second limitation is that only one participant represented each rank, which may not have captured a broad enough diversity of experience and opinion. Having one participant from each rank also limits the possibility to draw experiences from officers of the same rank who work in different departments. This limitation also reflects the limited scope of the research.

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the data capture method means that data was captured at a singular point in time rather than tracking the effects of austerity on officers perceived wellbeing over time. A longitudinal design may have led to more context and changes in opinions and perceptions over time.

5.5 Future research

Future research should focus on expanding the sample size to include a larger and more diverse pool of participants. This would also present the opportunity to include participants from multiple forces which would enable the researcher to compare whether differences in funding and organisational structures of different forces influences officers perception of the impact of austerity on their wellbeing.

Research in the area should also look to adopt a longitudinal approach. This will enable the researcher to track changes over time and examine how perceptions of the impact of austerity changes over time.

Finally, future research should explore intersectionality, allowing the researcher to investigate how factors such as gender, length of service, ethnicity and age intersect with participants perceptions.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research finds that austerity measures has had a clear and detrimental impact on police officers perception of their wellbeing, morale and job satisfaction. Reduced staffing, unmanageable workloads and increased assumption of responsibility for mental health and health related incidents and a changing workforce have elevated stress, lowered job satisfaction and support provisions for officers has not evolved to cope with the increased strain. Officers across all ranks cited operational pressures, supervisory strain and strategic challenges.

The study highlights a requirement for structural and cultural change within policing, including improved staffing levels, proactive wellbeing strategies, a focus on officer retention and stronger multi agency partnerships to ease the increasing burden of non-traditional policing demand.

Whilst there are limitations within this study that limit generalisability, the study has provided a valuable insight into the lived experiences of police officers who have experienced the impacts of austerity first hand. Ensuring officers wellbeing is protected is vital not only for legal and ethical considerations but is also critical for sustaining and maintaining effective and ethical policing in the face of ongoing financial and resourcing pressures.