

Assignment 2: Operational Police Practice 2
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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.

By its very nature, operational policing subjects officers to a range of stressors, including physical danger, traumatic events, organisational pressures, and an increasingly heavy workload. These challenges can significantly impact the individual wellbeing of officers and the collective wellbeing of their teams. Effective management of wellbeing is not just a matter of protecting officers; it also ensures they can perform their duties effectively, which is critical for public safety. This essay will explore the impact of operational policing on officers' mental health and highlight the risks associated with failing to manage wellbeing effectively. Drawing on academic research and relevant studies, the essay will argue that many officers are struggling to cope with the demands of operational policing, with potentially serious implications for their performance, public trust, and overall duty of care.

Operational policing frequently exposes officers to high-stress situations, putting their wellbeing at significant risk. In this context, wellbeing refers to an individual's physical and mental health (World Health Organization, 2022). Research consistently highlights that police officers, like other emergency workers, encounter a unique set of stressors, including exposure to traumatic events, the responsibility of managing distressed individuals, high job demands, the need to adhere to strict protocols, and the substantial pressure of protecting lives (Cartwright and Roach, 2020; Finn, 2000; Mind, 2020; Tehrani, 2011).

Unlike other occupational groups, police officers cope with mental health challenges in distinctive ways (Garbarino et al., 2013; Kapade-Nikam and Shaikh, 2014). Studies suggest that the distinct nature of policing, characterised by constant exposure to traumatic events like accidents, violence, and death, exacerbates the likelihood of developing mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Garbarino et al., 2013; Violanti et al., 2017), and can trigger ideations of suicide (McCanlies et al., 2014). Similarly, the unpredictability and intensity of police work have been found to contribute to chronic stress, often leading to psychological symptoms such as emotional exhaustion and burnout (Kumarasamy et al., 2016; Papazoglou and Andersen, 2014).

Unlike other emergency workers, such as firefighters or healthcare professionals, the police often come under increased scrutiny from the public, exacerbated in recent years following several high-profile police failures (Porter and Lee, 2023). The public's recent and vocal loss of confidence in the police's integrity has created a sense of underappreciation among officers, with the negative perception reducing morale, job satisfaction and making a career in policing more challenging as a result (Deuchar, Fallik and Crichlow, 2018; Police Federation of England and Wales, 2024). This is exacerbated by a feeling among officers that they are also underappreciated by the police force itself, creating an environment conducive to stress and burnout, which are barriers to overall wellbeing (Porter and Lee, 2023). Despite these feelings of underappreciation, officers must navigate the political and societal expectations inherent in human service professions by managing and displaying specific emotions during all of their public interactions, a concept Schaufeli, Maslach, and Marek (2018) call "emotional labour." This adds another layer of stress to an already demanding profession, underscoring the importance of police officers effectively managing their wellbeing.

Stressors in a policing context are typically categorised into two groups: operational and organisational (Purba and Demou, 2019; Shane, 2010). While operational stressors, like exposure to violence, death and traumatic events, are significant, research suggests that organisational stressors can have a greater impact on officers' wellbeing (Demou,

Hale, and Hunt, 2020; Tyagi and Dhar, 2014). Organisational stressors include long working hours, heavy workloads, the pressures of policing culture, lack of recognition, inadequate resources, and organisational change (Amaranto et al., 2003; Purba and Demou, 2019). A 2023 Police Federation Survey directly linked organisational stressors like poor staffing levels, unachievable deadlines, and refusal of annual leave with poor mental wellbeing among officers (Police Federation of England and Wales, 2024). These stressors are harmful because they are perceived as unavoidable and uncontrollable and thus unlikely to change or improve (Shane, 2010).

The impact of operational policing on wellbeing extends beyond psychological factors and can have physical consequences. Research indicates that individuals with PTSD or who have experienced trauma are more likely to suffer from chronic pain, autoimmune diseases, gastrointestinal disorders, and chronic fatigue (McCanlies et al., 2014). Consistent with these findings, police officers with PTSD symptoms often report a diminished quality of life, poor general health, frequent doctor's visits, higher rates of hospital admissions, and increased sick leave (Volanti et al., 2017). Moreover, research suggests that regular exposure to traumatic events can lead to structural changes in the brain, including a reduction in grey matter in the bilateral anterior cingulate cortex and the hippocampi (Papagni et al., 2010). These findings highlight the significant and multifaceted impact of operational policing on officers' physical and mental health and the implications of failing to manage wellbeing effectively.

Research consistently shows that police officers have a complex relationship with wellbeing, heavily influenced by organisational culture and a fear of stigma (Bell and Eski, 2016; Garbarino et al., 2013). In an organisational culture that values courage and bravery, displaying emotion can be considered a weakness, leading officers to suppress their emotions and avoid seeking mental health support (Garbarino et al., 2013). Fragoso and Kashubeck (2000) highlight how any "macho culture" that emphasises toughness and discourages emotional vulnerability creates a harmful cycle where individuals with poor mental health do not receive the necessary support, further exacerbating their state. This culture not only impacts officer wellbeing but also

contributes to broader issues within the police force, such as increased sick leave, early retirement, and reluctance to access available support services (Bell and Eski, 2016).

The impact of this culture is particularly damaging to female officers, who already face perceptions of being less capable of handling the job's emotional and physical demands (Chan, Doran and Marel, 2010). McCarty (2013) argues that macho culture makes women in policing more vulnerable to mental health issues, as they are more reluctant to seek help for fear they will be labelled incapable. This understanding is particularly concerning as female officers are more likely than their male colleagues to be diagnosed with mental health disorders and experience higher levels of related symptoms (Angehrn, Fletcher and Carleton, 2021). This highlights the influence of both organisational culture and gender on officer wellbeing, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address the impacts of organisational culture, as well as organisational stressors.

Stressors in policing have far-reaching effects, impacting not only officers themselves but also their personal lives and relationships. Police spouses often experience high levels of stress due to factors like their spouse's shift work, long hours, working during holidays, the amount of job-related information shared, and the constant risk of injury or death (Finn, 2000). Research has found that work-related stress often negatively affects police officers' families, which can lead to marital problems, further intensifying the officer's stress and creating a cycle of increasing pressure (Alexander and Walker, 1994). This self-perpetuating cycle highlights how the demands of the job can undermine the very relationships that are essential for managing those pressures (Alexander, 1993).

The importance of managing wellbeing extends beyond protecting officers and their families; it is crucial for protecting the public. According to the Code of Ethics, public service is a primary function of the police, which includes working in the public interest and delivering high-quality service (College of Policing, 2024). When officers struggle with their wellbeing, it directly hinders their ability to perform their duties effectively,

compromising the quality of service provided to the public (Garbarino et al., 2013). Research has shown that poor mental wellbeing among officers can lead to increased sick days, lower work quality, more confrontational interactions with the public, and a greater use of force (Manzoni and Eisner, 2006; Martinussen, Richardsen and Burke, 2007). Similarly, sleep deprivation, a common issue among police officers working shifts, has been linked to administrative errors, safety violations, and uncontrolled anger toward suspects (Garbarino et al., 2021). These issues not only impact the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the police force but have the potential to seriously damage public trust.

Data from police forces across the U.K. indicates that many police officers are struggling to manage their wellbeing. Recent research found that 82% of officers had experienced wellbeing concerns like stress, anxiety, depression while at work. The same survey concluded that mental health is a more common cause of sick leave than physical health among police officers, with around 75% of sick leave believed to be related to mental health issues (Police Federation of England and Wales, 2024). This picture of a wellbeing crisis among police officers is supported by research from the mental health charity Mind, which found that one in four emergency service workers had considered suicide due to job-related stress and poor mental health (Mind, 2016).

The widespread impact of poor mental health among officers poses significant challenges for the police force as a whole. Work-related mental health issues have socioeconomic consequences, including increased sick leave, limited productivity, and an increasing number of officers retiring early (Demou, Hale and Hunt, 2020). As more officers take leave or are put on restricted duties, those remaining face heavier workloads and increased stress, creating a cycle of pressure and burnout within the force. This environment not only exacerbates existing mental health issues but also complicates the return to work for officers who have taken time off. Cartwright and Roach (2020) found that 39% of officers who took mental health leave needed additional absences, suggesting that current support systems for returning officers are

inadequate. They argued that further research into support for officers with mental health issues must be prioritised to reduce and prevent this cycle.

As of March 2024, approximately 3,055 full-time equivalent police officers in England and Wales were on long-term sick leave, representing 2.1% of the police workforce. Additionally, 5,121 officers were on recuperative duties, and 9,008 were on adjusted duties, meaning over 17,000 officers were not fully operational (Home Office, 2024a). This marks a significant increase from 2017 when about 10,000 officers were in similar roles (Home Office, 2017). This rise in health-related absences has been linked to the budget cuts and staffing reductions that began with austerity measures in 2008 when government funding for police forces was reduced by 19%, leading to fewer officers and increased stress within an already strained workforce (Burchell et al., 2022; Cartwright and Roach, 2020; Sindall and Sturgis; 2013). While it is probable that these conditions have had a detrimental effect on officer wellbeing, more research is needed to conclusively understand how.

An alternative argument is that any increase in mental health-related absences could reflect a growing acceptance and understanding of mental health in the workplace, with more officers now feeling empowered to prioritise their wellbeing and take time off as needed (Cartwright and Roach, 2020). However, again, more research is needed to say this conclusively.

In conclusion, the impacts of operational policing on wellbeing are multifaceted and complex. While some operational aspects of policing are unavoidable, such as exposure to traumatic events and violence, the risk of injury, and the "emotional labour," it is the organisational pressures that have consistently been found to have the most significant impact on officers' wellbeing. Despite the widespread mental health issues that are evident among officers—such as anxiety, depression, burnout, and chronic stress—there is hope for improvement. Organisational stressors like heavy workloads, refusal of annual leave, poor staffing and low morale, unlike operational stressors, can be addressed through better funding, resource allocation, and improved staffing levels.

However, addressing these issues requires more than just logistical changes; it demands a cultural shift within policing itself. The macho culture within policing, which prioritises toughness and discourages vulnerability, continues to prevent officers from seeking the mental health support they need. For any meaningful improvement in wellbeing, this culture must evolve to encourage openness and support, especially for those facing additional barriers. Similarly, the ongoing cycle of officers taking sick leave due to stress and burnout, which in turn increases the pressure on those remaining, must be broken. The need for repeated mental health or stress leave suggests that current support measures are insufficient. A deeper understanding of why officers are not recovering fully during their time off is essential to developing more effective support systems.

A police workforce that is adequately able to manage wellbeing benefits not only individual officers, but also their families, colleagues, and broader society. Improving officer wellbeing has the potential to increase morale, productivity, and overall effectiveness of the police, which would, in turn, improve public confidence.

A successful, productive, and effective police force relies on a comprehensive understanding of the operational and organisational stressors faced by frontline officers. By identifying and addressing the issues that can be changed, the police force, with the support of the government and broader society, can retain and protect the very officers who are so essential to maintaining public safety.

Word count: 2,137

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.

Certain communities, particularly ethnic and racial minorities, have historically had strained relations with the police, resulting in a deep-seated mistrust and reluctance to engage. As Britain becomes increasingly diverse, it is crucial for the police force to build stronger connections with these communities if it is to work within the public interest. This essay argues that a partnership approach is a crucial strategy for bridging the divide between marginalised communities and the police, with the potential for positive outcomes such as reduced crime rates, more effective interventions and improved community relations. The essay will specifically explore the roots of distrust among the Black community in the U.K. and examine how policing partnerships have the opportunity to drive meaningful change.

In this essay, a partnership is defined as "an agreement between two or more organisations to work together" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). A partnership approach, therefore, is a strategy that involves using multiple partners or agencies collaboratively to address shared challenges. Rather than being an end in itself, a partnership approach is seen as a means to achieve a specific outcome (Berry et al., 2011).

In 2002, Rosenbaum identified several key benefits of effective partnerships in the context of crime reduction, including increased accountability among organisations, reduced duplication of services, improved public participation in crime prevention campaigns, and the development of more targeted and effective interventions. In many cases, public service agencies are already working with the same high-risk populations, making a multi-organisational approach both efficient and effective (Meyer and Mazerolle, 2013). Research has shown that by combining resources, skills, knowledge,

and experiences, a partnership approach can achieve better outcomes than working individually (College of Policing, 2023; Rosenbaum, 2002). When implemented effectively, partnerships have the potential to reduce costs and distribute the responsibilities of crime management across multiple partners (Mazerolle and Ransley, 2019). However, these benefits are dependent on the partnership functioning effectively; merely establishing a partnership does not guarantee positive outcomes (Berry et al., 2011).

In policing, partnerships are generally formed with the understanding that no single agency can effectively address all of the complex issues related to community safety and crime (Berry et al., 2011; Farrell, 2022). In England and Wales, the police have adopted a partnership approach to crime reduction for several decades. In 1998, the Crime and Disorder Act formally established Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) among organisations like the police, fire and rescue services, local authorities, health agencies, and more, in an effort to formulate and implement strategies to tackle crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998). Working on the premise that "effective partnership working is vital to ensuring safer communities," over 300 CSPs are operational in England and Wales as of 2024 (Home Office, 2023).

As policing shifts towards a more proactive approach to tackling crime, the police work alongside organisations like housing agencies, schools, child and youth services, and grassroots organisations to tackle issues like crime, antisocial behaviour, drug misuse, and community relations, addressing their root causes and working towards prevention (McCarthy and O'Neill, 2014). By working with trusted community organisations that have closer connections to specific groups, the police can ensure that their strategies are culturally sensitive and responsive to community needs. This collaborative approach not only strengthens engagement but also fosters long-term trust and confidence in the police (College of Policing, 2013).

The concept of "policing by consent" has long been a cornerstone of policing in England and Wales. It centres on the idea that the police depend on the public's consent,

approval, and support to function effectively (College of Policing, 2015; Home Office, 2012). Positive engagement between police and the public is critical, as good relations can reduce crime, encourage respect for the law, and foster a sense of social responsibility (College of Policing, 2013). However, in an increasingly diverse society, there is no single "public" but many communities, each with their own perceptions and expectations of the police (Jones and Newburn, 2001). While universal approval of the police is not a realistic goal (Jones and Newburn, 2001), fostering improved relationships with minority groups is critical for the effective functioning of the police force and its ability to comprehensively serve and protect the public (Bhugowandeen, 2013; Madon, Murphy and Sargeant, 2017).

Relations between the police and Black communities in the U.K. have been marred by a long history of tension rooted in racial disparities, discriminatory practices, and high-profile policing failures. These issues have fostered deep-seated scepticism and distrust within these communities (College of Policing and NPCC, 2022). The 1981 Brixton Riots, which arose from persistent racial tensions, socioeconomic disparities and allegations of police brutality, highlighted the harmful impact of policing practices on Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups (Bowling and Phillips, 2003). The subsequent Scarman report underscored the need for systemic reform to address these issues and rebuild trust, particularly within Black communities (Scarman, 1981). Despite the report's conclusion that the Metropolitan Police were not institutionally racist, it called for significant changes to improve police-community relations (Keith, 1993). These tensions resurfaced with the 1999 Macpherson report, which was published in the years that followed the murder of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993. This report found evidence of institutional racism within the police and emphasised the inadequacy of a predominantly white police force in serving a diverse society.

Despite various efforts to address these issues, practices such as the disproportionate use of stop and search, excessive force, and Taser deployment against BAME groups have continued to undermine trust and exacerbate tensions (Delsol and Shiner, 2006). As recently as 2021, Black people in England and Wales were found to be seven times

more likely to be stopped and searched than their white counterparts (Home Office, 2021), a disparity indicative of unlawful racial discrimination (Bowling and Phillips, 2007). This continued inequality damages public trust, as studies have consistently shown that experiences of stop and search significantly decrease an individual's willingness to engage with the police (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019; Miller, Bland and Quinton, 2000). The disproportionate impact on BAME groups has contributed to a widening trust gap among minority communities, fostering feelings of alienation, hostility, and a steadfast lack of confidence in the police (Lammy, 2017; Keeling, 2017). This mistrust is often reinforced within communities, as negative experiences—whether personal or observed—shape collective perceptions of the police (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Consequently, even isolated incidents of police misconduct can have far-reaching effects, underscoring the importance of fostering positive community relations, particularly with hard-to-reach groups (Madon, Murphy, and Sargeant, 2017).

Despite efforts by police in the U.K. to improve relations with hard-to-reach communities, such as initiatives to increase minority representation within the force and campaigns with young BAME individuals, systemic challenges persist (Bury et al., 2018). High-profile police failings in the U.K. and internationally continue to erode trust and prevent meaningful improvements in police-community relations (Strom and Wire, 2024). The 2020 murder of George Floyd in the United States sparked global protests and intensified scrutiny of police practices, particularly the disproportionate use of force against racial minorities. These incidents only deepen the sense of alienation among minority communities, preventing any positive developments and leading them to further distance themselves from the police, even in situations where they might need help (Strom and Wire, 2024; Weitzer, 2010).

The strained relationship between Black communities and the police in the U.K. has reached a critical point, necessitating urgent action (Home Affairs Committee, 2021). In response, in 2022, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing launched the Police Race Action Plan to create a police service that is actively anti-racist and trusted by Black people (College of Policing and NPCC, 2022). The

NPCC acknowledged the "collective failure" of the police to deliver equitable and professional services to individuals based on their race, culture, or ethnic origin and recognised the historical mistrust that Black communities hold towards the police (College of Policing and NPCC, 2022, p.2). The action plan emphasises rebuilding trust and regaining the confidence of Black communities through focused community policing efforts and a commitment to addressing institutionalised racism. Key components of this strategy include the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy toward racism, increasing BAME representation within the police force, and fostering greater involvement of Black communities in police decision-making (College of Policing and NPCC, 2022).

While it is too early to assess the success of this particular initiative, research suggests that targeted and inclusive engagement strategies are crucial for bridging the gap between the police and hard-to-engage communities (Dickson, 2019; Longstaff et al., 2015). Studies show that partnerships can enable the police to use the expertise and resources of multiple agencies and organisations (Rosenbaum, 2002), which are necessary in circumstances where the relationships need building from the ground up or the police lack adequate resources (College of Policing, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2002). By collaborating with trusted community figures or external groups, the police can gain valuable insights into cultural sensitivities, historical tensions, and social dynamics that might otherwise be overlooked, particularly given that the vast majority of British police officers are white (College of Policing, 2020; GOV.UK, 2023).

Directly involving community members in decision-making processes and policing initiatives can help build a sense of ownership and trust, making them more likely to see the police as partners rather than adversaries (OSCE, 2022). This collaborative approach can lead to the shared creation of strategies that are more reflective of the needs of diverse communities, improving engagement and reducing conflict (College of Policing, 2013; Tyler and Huo, 2002). This, in turn, can improve the perception of police among minority groups, which can enhance police legitimacy and therefore develop a greater respect for the law (College of Policing, 2013).

Previous initiatives show that it is possible to bridge the gap between the police and traditionally hard-to-reach communities using a partnership approach. The Boston Ceasefire program of the 1990s successfully reduced gang firearm homicides by over 50% through an approach that brought together police, youth workers and clergy members (Braga, Turchan and Winship, 2019). The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit later adapted this model in Glasgow, leading to significant reductions in violent crime. In 2019, using a similar focus on multi-agency collaboration, Northamptonshire Police implemented a program which achieved a 40% reduction in offending (Community Initiative to Reduce Violence, 2023). While these programs provide insight into the success possible using a partnership approach, more research is needed specifically into the potential benefits and outcomes of a partnership approach focused on the relationship between Black communities and the police in the U.K.

Despite well-meaning intentions, it is essential that any partnership initiatives focused on rebuilding relations with the Black community do not inadvertently translate into over-policing or a feeling of increased surveillance. Critics have raised concerns that non-police organisations, such as youth groups and schools, may become "the eyes and ears of the police" (Kundnani, 2016; Nijjar, 2020). The No Police in Schools campaign argued that police presence in schools does little to improve relations between the Black community and the police and instead exacerbates tensions in communities that already feel over-policed (No Police in Schools, 2020). When the police acknowledge their own institutionalised racism, expanding their presence into other areas of public life, like education or community groups, can heighten fears of over-policing and excessive surveillance (Nijjar, 2020).

Moreover, for any attempt at bridging the gap between marginalised communities and the police to be successful, it is imperative that all participating organisations demonstrate an equal commitment to anti-racist practices. Without mutual commitment and accountability among these organisations, a partnership approach risks worsening feelings of alienation rather than facilitating inclusion and positive relations. The police must also continue to address ongoing issues of racism and disproportionality within the

force. Even a successful partnership approach will struggle to regain the trust of Black communities if Black people continue to face disproportionate rates of stop-and-search and excessive force. Addressing systemic racism within the police force is crucial, not only for building trust within partnerships but also for ensuring that continued discriminatory practices do not undermine the positive initiatives aimed at fostering better relationships with BAME communities.

In conclusion, while the relationship between marginalised communities and the police in the U.K. has been fraught with tension and distrust, a partnership approach offers a promising path forward. While further research is needed to fully understand the potential benefits of a multi-agency partnership on police-community relations, previous initiatives show promise.

However, given the deep-rooted mistrust that many minority communities have towards the police, these partnerships alone will not be enough. To truly bridge the gap, the police must also follow through with their promises to tackle the institutionalised racism that continues to alienate Black communities. Without this broader commitment, any partnership efforts will fall short, especially if these initiatives inadvertently reinforce perceptions of over-policing. Ensuring that partnerships do not intensify feelings of distrust will be crucial in making any efforts truly effective and sustainable in rebuilding trust and fostering genuine community engagement.

Word count: 2,157

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