

TITLE: “Prevalence of Mental Health Issues in Britain Police - Impact on Performance and Public Interaction”

Student Name: Lee Fuge

Student ID: 2131847

University Name: University of Wales - Trinity Saint David

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Table of Contents

Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	3
2.1 Introduction	3
2.2 Prevalence of Mental Health Issues Among Police Officers.....	3
2.3 Impact of Mental Health Issues on Police Performance	4
2.4 Stigma and Barriers to Seeking Help	6
2.5 Public Interactions and Community Relations	6
2.6 Review of Wellbeing Programs and Support Mechanisms	7
2.7 Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.8 Literature Gap	8
2.9 Summary	9
References	10

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review contributes to the critical assessment of the extent and severity of mental health problems within Britain's police forces by focusing on their consequential impacts on job performance and public interactions. This will be based on synthesising findings from relevant empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and the latest research into a broad framework for understanding the phenomena. It seeks to outline the prevalence rates of mental health conditions like PTSD, depression, and anxiety in police officers and to explore their implications for operational effectiveness and community relations. Besides, the review looks at the currently available support mechanisms and points out the gaps in the current research for further investigation.

2.2 Prevalence of Mental Health Issues Among Police Officers

According to Jetelina et al., (2020), the prevalence of mental health disorders among police officers has been the subject of much academic interest. In policing, exposure to traumatic events is part of the job, globally bringing higher incidents of psychological distress compared with the general population. Empirical studies are unanimous in reporting high levels of PTSD, depression, and anxiety among police officers, primarily affected by their daily occupational hazards. Quite influential in this respect is a meta-analytic review by Fuller et al., (2024) on PTSD among police officers, which showed lifetime prevalence estimates ranging from 7% to 19%. The differential exposure to critical incidents and events of a traumatic nature accounted for the variability of such findings. It points out horrific exposures and quantifies their relationship with increased PTSD risk in policing. This vulnerability has a double effect: both high frequency and high intensity of traumatic experiences occurring from policing are well above the usual workplace stressors found elsewhere.

In the context of Britain, the situation mirrors these disquieting trends that have been revealed in other parts of the globe. British police officers experience a similar range of issues within their ranks, most of which are dominated by PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Brewin et al., 2022). In terms of the nature of UK policing, characterised by high-stress situations that involve violence or suffering of one form or another, predisposes them to such mental conditions. Complicating the situation even further is the pervasive stigma associated

with mental health issues within the force, which often deters officers from seeking the necessary psychological help. Further, confounding things in the psychological landscape of policing is the co-occurrence of mental health disorders with substance abuse. Zegel et al., (2023) explore this intersection, indicating that substance abuse and clinical depression frequently co-occur with PTSD in police populations. Their research underlined how the Job-related inherent stress and trauma of police work, not only precipitating depressive symptoms, drive some officers toward substance use. Such a dual burden to mental health challenges and being dependency-bound creates a complex clinical profile requiring proper comprehensive strategies for intervention and support.

The studies all point out the importance of targeted mental health intervention and robust support systems maintaining police forces. With increased rates of PTSD, depression, and anxiety, proactive mental health with periodic psychological tests, easily accessible and available mental health services, and an organisational culture that looks after mental well-being become necessary (Waring and Giles, 2021). Such measures, however, are crucial not only for the health of the officers but also for the efficiency of the police force in performing the roles assigned to them by society. The fact that mental health problems prevail among police officers in Britain underlines an important occupational health issue but also a broader public service challenge. Addressing these issues effectively is crucial for maintaining officer health and ensuring their capacity to engage positively with the communities they serve.

2.3 Impact of Mental Health Issues on Police Performance

According to Jellestad et al., (2021) the impact of mental health disorders, like PTSD, depression, and anxiety, is profound and multifaceted on the functional performance of police duties. All such conditions create a syndrome that hits at the very hub of cognitive and behavioural functions relevant to effective policing. These mental health problems can lower levels of concentration, decision-making capacity, and motivation; this decrease in cognitive function might be dangerous not only to officers but also to the public members whom they serve. The most affectation is on cognitive functions, and PTSD is, therefore, a common ailment in police officers, considering that they are highly exposed to traumatic occurrences (Hogg et al., 2023). The findings revealed that PTSD is a significant determinant of poor concentration, sleep disturbances, and hyper-vigilance. During the execution of routine duties as an officer, these symptoms lower

Alertness and Response two significant aspects where a slender line exists between life and death. This intrusive nature of symptoms of PTSD, therefore, affects quick information processing, which is quite essential for officers in emergencies (Al Jowf et al., 2023).

Similarly, cognitive functions are affected, although differently, by no less severe disturbances due to depression. Lawlor et al., (2020) comment on how depressive disorders contribute to reduced decision-making efficiency and slow response times in subjects. A general feeling of fatigue and loss of energy related to the disorder infuses a lack of motivation that can prove fatally disastrous in some fervent working jobs demanding continuous active engagement and quick reflexive action. Furthermore, the impacts of depression on cognitive processing contribute to poorer problem-solving abilities and incapacitating decision-making in job performance (Wisenthal, 2021). Another critical aspect concerning parallel mental injuries, such as anxiety disorders, relates to undermining police performance. In anxiety, an officer is usually characterised by a continuous feeling of worry and tension that may be overloading in nature to the mental resources, hence leaving less capacity needed for focus during patrol duties or crisis interventions. Such might cause inappropriate or excessive responses in officers experiencing some event that has potential threats, hence affecting their judgment at very critical moments.

The high level of anxiety will not only affect their decision-making but also create avoidance behaviours whereby the officers shy away from involving themselves in situations that trigger stress, hence impairing their overall performance and execution of duties. These interplays between mental health and job performance are further complicated by the behavioural changes these engender. According to Blumberg et al., (2020), officers experiencing these conditions often withdraw, reducing participation in team activities and causing a general decline in work ethic, which may affect team dynamics and overall organisational morale. Such behavioural changes are significant because they can result in the isolation of the affected individual, reducing their access to support from colleagues and further deteriorating mental health conditions. The overall cognitive and behavioural impacts of PTSD, depression, and anxiety create a self-strengthening cycle that affects not only individuals suffering but also the efficiency and effectiveness of the police force at large (González-Prendes et al., 2019). It is the responsibility of these impacts to be understood and addressed. Therefore, comprehensive mental health strategies would abate these

effects and help law enforcement officers perform and retain their overall performance and welfare.

2.4 Stigma and Barriers to Seeking Help

The pervasive 'warrior mindset' within policing cultures, therefore, is a significant contributory factor to the stigmatisation of mental health issues and brings considerable barriers to seeking necessary psychological help (Reinard, 2020). Characterised by values of toughness and emotional stoicism, this stance brands vulnerability as weakness anathema to the perceived ideals of police work. This cultural norm, in particular, discourages not only the acknowledgement of officers but also help-seeking due to possible fear of judgment or even career repercussions. Moreover, issues about confidentiality and probable impacts on careers following disclosure contribute to reluctance to seek help (Newell et al., 2022). Many officers fear that disclosure of such struggles could raise the possibility of being declared unfit for duty or trigger undesirable job assignments, which would hinder career advancement.

This fear is instilled despite the availability of mental health resources and furthers the entrenchment, making efforts toward effective mental health management within the force quite complex. The barriers have profound implications, not only keeping individual officers from getting the appropriate care, but such a work environment will memorialise mental health issues that are likely to worsen (Wynter et al., 2023). This case, therefore, brings out even more reasons why policing institutions have to grapple with the dominant warrior mindset, setting a culture in which mental resilience is. Equally important to these men and women is that it allows open attitudes toward discussing individual mental health and support in seeking help where needed.

2.5 Public Interactions and Community Relations

These mental health issues have a direct and profound impact on the relationship of police officers with members of the public. It impacts how community relations will be and would directly influence the levels of trust the public could have in force. The officers, bearing the brunt of one or other kinds of mental disorders, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, etc., are generally less able to deal with stressors in public encounters (Williams and Williams, 2020). This reduced capacity, therefore, can contribute to impaired communication, misjudgment, and, at times, overly aggressive acts inappropriate to the situational demands. These instances can erode public trust when the community views the interactions as representative of broader institutional problems

within the ranks. Moreover, it also affects the mental health status of the officers themselves while dealing with community members compassionately, which is an inherent part of trust building.

Mental health issues can erode the patience and forbearance required to be an effective officer for positive community policing practices. As a result of this, communities feel less protected and more threatened by their police force (Shane, 2019). This further deteriorates trust and cooperation only. Hence, the officers' mental health is related to how well they can maintain good community relationships. By prioritising mental health, not only are the officers helped, but it becomes a foundation for a trustworthy and cooperative relationship between the police department and the public. The mental health challenges have to be addressed, therefore, not solely for the sake of the officers' health but for the holistic well-being of the communities they used to serve.

2.6 Review of Wellbeing Programs and Support Mechanisms

Wellbeing programs for police officers and supportive systems within forces are vital in conquering mental health challenges in the force (Anderson et al., 2020). This may include psychological counselling, workshops on managing stress, and peer support networks, which will provide an officer with the wherewithal to cope efficiently with job-related psychological stressors. However, their efficacy is variable, and often, it depends upon the accessibility and acceptance level within the police culture for mental health support. Wellbeing initiative evaluations posit that when thematically helpful for raising awareness of mental health and allowing some degree of immediate relief, their long-term effectiveness in mitigating negative impacts upon police duties is mixed (Lee et al., 2020).

One critical factor influencing their success is the degree of proactive engagement from leadership within the forces. Programs that are actively supported by police leadership and integrated into the daily operations of the force are more successful because mental health discussions become normalised, and seeking help becomes accepted and routinised as part of police work (Edwards and Kotera, 2021). Further, such programs need constant monitoring and updating to keep up with the changing needs of the officers and apply new psychological research together with new therapeutic practices. Expanding and improving these support mechanisms can better prepare police departments for upgrading the mental health of their officers and, in return, improve their job performance and relationships with citizens.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

Some major theoretical underpinnings come from psychological and, with a particular interest in law enforcement, sociological theories concerning mental health problems within occupational settings. From a psychological level, the JD-R model will be of the essence: High levels of demands at work, such as high-risk policing situations, may give rise to stress if job resources do not appropriately counterbalance them regarding support systems and coping strategies (Faeth, 2019). This may further lead to extreme exhaustion and health problems both mental and physical and may include PTSD, anxiety, depression, and others. Sociologically, the idea of social stigma coming down aspect, basically towards mental health throws light on the police situation.

It explains precisely how expectations from society and norms internalised through the culture of policing create a stigma against mental health issues, making it hard for officers to seek help. The stigma associated with mental health in law enforcement is then compounded by the warrior ethos that glorifies toughness and resilience at the expense of vulnerability and emotional well-being (Craddock and Telesco, 2022). Accordingly, the theory explains jointly why mental health issues are so prevalent but persistently under-recognised in the policing profession. They underline the interplay of individual psychological experiences and broader sociocultural factors that interact to shape the mental health landscape within law enforcement settings. This theoretical understanding can help in working out the appropriate interventions by dealing with individual and systemic dimensions of mental health in policing.

2.8 Literature Gap

While the literature regarding police officers's mental health is long, including many studies with a global perspective, significant gaps exist, especially regarding Britain. Much of the research is focused on North American or Australian law enforcement settings, whereas there needs to be more comprehensive coverage of the UK (Brookman et al., 2019). This geographic discrepancy brings to the fore a significant gap in understanding factors specific to the UK, bearing on the mental health of officers through differences in policing practices, public perceptions, and support systems. In particular, there is a paucity of data investigating the efficacy of mental health interventions as specifically tailored to the UK police force. Most studies provide generic recommendations that may not fully align with operational realities and cultural nuances within

British policing (van Dijk, 2022). This study intends to fill these gaps, focusing on the prevalence, implications, and facilitators of mental health issues and problems in England's police forces. In this light, the research inputs will offer worthwhile insights relevant to improving policy and practice, specifically within the UK context.

2.9 Summary

This literature review stipulated is just how significant a prevalence and effect there are for mental health issues among police officers, particularly in the context of the UK. It has explored the PTSD, depression, and anxiety implications for officer performance, public interactions with officers, and internal police culture. This also highlighted existing gaps in the research due to the absence of UK-specific studies and interventions. It is in addressing these gaps that this research, though critical, seeks to inform and develop improved understanding and support mechanisms for mental health in British policing toward better officer well-being and effective community-police relations.

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