

3. Research Methodology chapter

3.1 Introduction

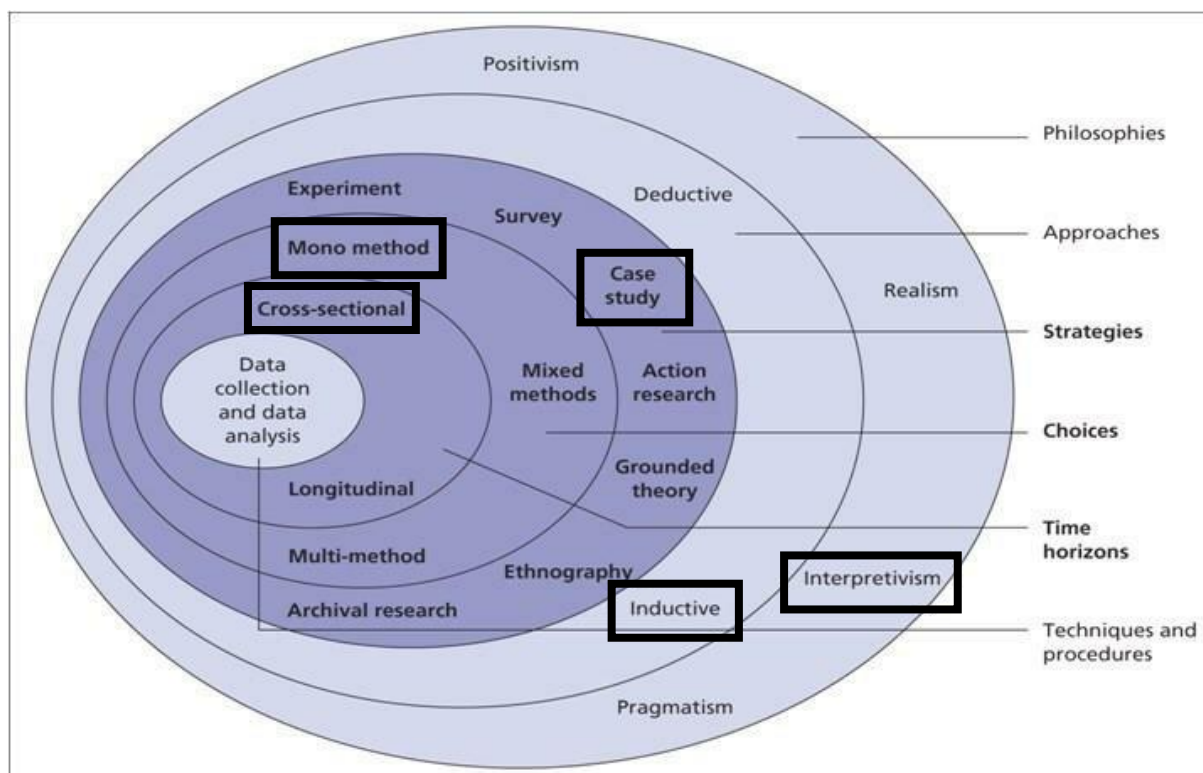
This chapter will outline the research methodology used to explore the perceived impact of austerity on the wellbeing of police officers. Research is defined as a systematic and methodical process of seeking knowledge and the expansion of existing knowledge through careful investigation (Deb et al., 2018; Ghanad, 2023).

The study will utilise a qualitative approach, focusing on the lived experiences of police officers of varying ranks who have at least 18 years of service. Through the use of semi structured interviews with officers of varying ranks who have a significant length of service, this study will aim to provide personal and lived insights into the perceived impact that austerity measures have had on police officers' mental health, morale, job satisfaction and overall wellbeing.

3.2 Research Onion

The Research Onion is a conceptual framework by Saunders, et al (2009) which gives researchers a framework in which to systematically outline and design their research methodology.

Figure 1.1 displays the researchers chosen research process



3.2.1 Research philosophy: Interpretivism

The research philosophy which will guide this study is an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is a research approach that views reality as a subjective concept which is shaped through individuals' perceptions and interpretation and emphasises subjective human experiences (Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2018; Marhayati, 2020).

This philosophical approach is appropriate as the study will aim to explore police officers' perception rather than measure quantitative data. An interpretivist approach will allow the researcher to explore how officers interpret and subjectively feel about the impact that austerity measures has had on their wellbeing through a naturalistic method (McFarland, 2014).

3.2.2 Research approach: Inductive

The study will utilise an inductive approach to qualitative research. An inductive approach seeks to build theories from observations rather than testing existing theories (Bucher, 2021) and is particularly useful for qualitative studies due to the lack of preconceived ideas (McKercher, 2024).

3.2.3 Research strategy: Case study via semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews will be the primary source of data collection. This strategy allows participants to provide in-depth, detailed, focused accounts whilst allowing them the flexibility to explore relevant connected ideas (Al Balushi, 2018; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interview questions were developed in alignment with current literature on the topic of austerity, its impact on society and its impact on police officer wellbeing, which will ensure that the interview is focused and relevant throughout.

Three police officers of escalating ranks from Constable, Sergeant and Inspector were interviewed in order to obtain a varied and diverse range of perspectives from officers with variation in terms of roles and responsibilities. This approach recognises that individuals in policing may be more or less affected by austerity based on their rank, and that officers of different ranks may experience the impact of austerity in different ways and ensure that a wide range of perspectives are explored.

3.2.4 Methodological choice: Mono method

The methodology of choice is mono method, utilising a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a method of data collection that captures the lived experiences of individuals and groups (Awasthy, 2019; Tandon, 2021). This method has been chosen in order to obtain comprehensive and detailed data; as well as exploring complex social and organisational issues and phenomena (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008; Oranga and Matere, 2023). This research approach is particularly

relevant as police officers' face both external and internal challenges which can impact their wellbeing (Tuttle et al., 2019).

The use of qualitative research will allow the researcher to gather rich and nuanced data which cannot be obtained via quantitative research methods such as surveys and statistical methods. A quantitative approach would be less beneficial as the research question is nuanced and depends on detailed perception. Therefore statistical, quantitative data would not yield the data required.

3.2.5 Time Horizon: Cross sectional

This research adopts a cross-sectional time horizon whereby data will be collected at a singular point in time (Zuleika and Siswo, 2022). Although the nature of the research question dictates that participants will reflect on past experiences throughout the post austerity period, the study is not longitudinal in design, and it will not measure changes over time.

The benefits of cross-sectional research are that it is low cost, and the findings can be produced quickly and efficiently (Ray, 2020). Cross sectional research also establishes preliminary evidence for future studies (Zuleika and Siswo, 2022; Wang and Cheng, 2020). However, cross-sectional research has limitations in establishing causality and temporal order (Maier et al., 2023; Bowen & Wiersema, 1999).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.1 Data collection

Data will be gathered via 45–60-minute semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted in person or via an online conference call depending on participants availability. The audio will be recorded with informed consent and the contents will be transcribed for analysis. Semi structured interviews are a valuable qualitative research method which provides participant flexibility and in depth data collection (Adams, 2015).

The interview schedule comprises of open-ended questions which are focused on key topics such as organisational change, morale, workload, mental health and perceived support mechanisms. Open ended questions are shown to promote creative thinking and communications skills and require more complex thought (Badger and Thomas, 1991; Septiani et al., 2022).

Questions are designed to maintain topic focus whilst allowing participants the freedom to direct elements of the interview towards issues and topics they deem to be relevant to the research question.

3.3.2 Sampling:

A purposive sampling approach has been adopted to select three police officers of escalating ranks who have worked in policing prior to the introduction of austerity policies until the present day. This sampling criteria ensures that participants have the relevant experience and can recall how they have perceived policing to have changed over a relevant time period.

Purposive sampling is a technique used in qualitative and quantitative research to select participants with specific knowledge and experiences that are relevant to the research question (Tongco, 2007; Suen et al., 2014). The primary advantage of purposive sampling is its efficiency in gathering rich and informed information from carefully selected participants (Suen et al., 2014; Stratton, 2024). However a limitation of this method of sampling is that there is a risk of inherent bias from participants (Tongco, 2007).

3.3.3 Data analysis:

Given the qualitative, inductive and interpretivist nature of this study, the data collected through semi-structured interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework popularised by Braun and Clarke (2014).

Thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysing subjective experiences and perceptions as it is a widely used qualitative research method for identifying and interpreting patterns within data (Braun and Clarke, 2014).

This technique of data analysis is consistent with the research philosophy, and approach, as it identifies the patterns and themes emerging from data (Peterson, 2017) rather than reinforcing pre-existing theories.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from University of Wales Trinity Saint David's ethics committee prior to the commencement of the study and the interview process to ensure that the study and methods were ethical. Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form informing participants of the voluntary nature of their involvement in the study, the purpose of the study, the subsequent use of their data and the right to withdraw their consent and participation at any time.

The topics and concerns explored in this study may raise issues whereby participants will feel the need to comment on and critique organisational and operational policies and decisions. This can raise issues within a hierarchical and disciplined organisation such as the police, with participants fearful of being fully honest and transparent due to fear of repercussions. A participant numbering system will be utilised to anonymize participants e.g. (Participant A: Constable). No names or personal data will be used to link the participants to the research data. All recordings, transcripts and notes will be stored on a secure encrypted device and

deleted 6 months after the completion of the study. Only the researcher will have access to participants data.

Due to the sensitive nature of wellbeing topics being explored, participants will be signposted to support services post interview to ensure that the wellbeing of participants is taken into consideration throughout the process.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research methodology using the structure of Saunders et al's (2017) Research Onion. This study is Interpretivist in philosophy, inductive in approach and qualitative in method, utilising semi structured interviews with a case study strategy. Research data will be collected cross sectionally and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2014) method of thematic analysis. Each method and approach have been chosen in alignment with the study's aim of understanding the perceived impact of austerity policies on the wellbeing of police officers.

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