

Exploring the experiences of workplace stress within the UK police

Exploring the psychological stressors affecting those employed in UK policing.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Nottingham
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Police region	East Midlands
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	June 2022
Date due for completion	August 2024

Research context

The aim of this research is to consider the psychological wellbeing of police employees in the UK and the barriers that stop them seeking help when they may need it.

This will be achieved using a mixed methods approach consisting of two research studies.

Study one

The aim of study one is to explore the experiences of workplace stress in police employees in the UK, and if there is a relationship between burnout and moral injury.

Burnout is characterised as chronic workplace stress that has not been sufficiently managed. Moral injury is a response to an action, or inaction, which violates a person’s deeply held moral beliefs and values. In police employees, this could be causing injury to a suspect in the line of duty, being

unable to save a victim from death, having to arrest suspects for a cause with which an officer can sympathise.

Research has suggested that burnout and moral injury are phenomena which affect those in the police, but the two concepts have not been looked at in conjunction with one another to explore the presence of a relationship.

Study one aims to contribute to the literature about burnout and moral injury as two separate constructs as well as together. By understanding the psychological vulnerabilities present in policing, interventions can be developed which target these. Training input to improve resilience is another option.

In addition, study one aims to explore if there are certain organisational and/or occupational stressors that contribute to feelings of burnout and moral injury.

Study two

Study two aims to examine barriers to help-seeking within police employees. Research suggests that stigma, shame and the culture of policing may prevent staff members seeking help for their mental health when they need it. Semi-structured interviews and subsequent analysis will aim to offer insight into the lived experience of police employees and why they may feel unable to ask for help, or what stands in the way of them doing so.

If it is known what stops someone from wanting to speak to another when they are suffering, changes can be made to break down these barriers and make individuals feel more able to seek help when they need it. Study two aims to contribute to the literature exploring this subject.

Research methodology

Participants in both studies will be current serving or retired police employees. This study will be open to all employees – regardless of rank or role within their organisation, as well as volunteers/unpaid workers. Participants will be recruited through social media as well as groups designed for police employees. Forces will also be contacted to see if they will advertise the study on their force intranet to reach a wider policing audience.

Participants will be invited to complete a series of online scales which will take around 15 to 20 minutes to complete. It is anticipated that reading the study advertisement and informed consent information will take a further 5 minutes before participants begin the scales.

Based on research in the general topic area, with a similar sample, the aim will be to recruit a sample of a size no less than 150 participants for study one. This will afford more opportunity for in-depth statistical analysis (for example, comparisons between rank and/or role).

Data will be analysed using standard multiple regression to explore relationships and a series of One-Way Between-Groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to explore differences between groups. Data will be exported and analysed in SPSS.

Participants who complete study one will also be asked if they would be willing to be contacted about a possible interview to talk about barriers to seeking help (study two). There will be the opportunity to leave contact details so that the researcher can correspond with those who confirm their interest.

Study two will be conducted online using MS Teams after potential participants have been contacted using the details they provided. Transcripts will be completed using the MS Teams software and quality-checked by the lead researcher. Audio recordings will then be deleted.

Qualitative data from study two will be analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which lends itself to explorations of the lived experience of individuals.

All quantitative and qualitative data will be saved on a password-protected University of Nottingham OneDrive account. This software is compliant with GDPR regulations.

Research participation

Eligible participants include any current, former or retired UK police employees of any rank or role.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact the researcher at natalie.bloom@nottingham.ac.uk or complete the following survey.

[Complete the survey](#)