

Policing and living well

Exploring how police officers may suffer from injury and traumatic stress and how these experiences may impact wellbeing and coping.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Exeter
Principal researcher(s)	Nick Smith n.smith6@exeter.ac.uk
Collaboration and partnership	National Police Wellbeing Service
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	September 2021
Date due for completion	September 2025

Research context

Police officers are exposed to lots of stresses and may get injured. Most citizens will experience between three to four potentially traumatic events in their lifetime, whereas each police officer is likely to experience between 400 to 600 in their policing career (Avon and Somerset Police Federation, 2021).

Furthermore, police officers have a high risk of injury through assaults during operational policing activity (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022), as well as through sports, motor vehicle accidents and previous military service outside of policing (Smith and others, 2021).

Such experiences can affect how a police officer perceives and interacts with members of the public (Johnson, 2019). They can also negatively impact their wellbeing, leading to increased mental health difficulties, such as anxiety and depression (ONS, 2019).

The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between injury and stress in a nationally representative population of police officers, appealing to all officers with or without previous injury. The results will lead to better ways to support police officers after traumatic events and develop a more trauma-informed police service.

References

- Avon and Somerset Police Federation. (2021). [Capture Data on Traumatic Incidents](#) [internet]. [Accessed 18 July 2022]
- Johnson LA. (2019). 'Understanding Assaults against Police Officers: A study of conflict escalation in police encounters with the public'. Doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds.
- Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2019). Home Office Police Front Line Review: Workshops with police officers and police staff.
- Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2022). [Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2022](#) [internet]. [Accessed 26 September 2022]
- Smith NI and others. (2021). 'A pilot study of brain injury in police officers: A source of mental health problems?' Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 28(1), pp 43-55.

Research methodology

A nationwide [online survey](#) will be sent out to all serving police officers across the UK.

The survey can be completed via mobile phone or internet-enabled devices. It contains questions about injury, stress and alcohol use, and takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

All responses will be completely anonymous (meaning that responses cannot be traced back to any individuals or police forces taking part). We aim to recruit approximately 500 serving police officers.

Psychometric network analysis will be used to examine the most significant symptoms of trauma-related stress and injury in our sample. This has valuable clinical implications as these symptoms can be targeted in assessment, monitoring and therapy.

Geographical area

Nationwide.

Target sample size

500 serving police officers.

Participants - inclusion criteria

All serving police officers in a UK police force of any rank and role are eligible to participate in this study.

We aim for this study to be as representative of the national police population as possible. We aim to appeal to all officers with or without previous injury.

[Take the survey](#)

Tags

- [Wellbeing](#)
- [Mental health](#)