

A critical examination of the use of police special constables in the COVID-19 pandemic

Critically analysing the use of the Special Constabulary as a policing resource during the COVID-19 pandemic among the four Welsh police forces.

Key details

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Police region	Wales
Level of research	PhD
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Research context

In March 2019, the police had no choice but to quickly adapt to a new challenge. COVID-19 became a fast-growing public health crisis, posing life-threatening consequences.

One vital resource that was crucial for being an extra resource and 'bridging the gap' between the police and communities was the Special Constabulary. As stated in Robert Peel's principles of policing – which still shape modern policing today – a relationship with the public is integral. It could be argued that one way the public and the police can be merged is through the use of the Special Constabulary. However, with little academic literature around special constables and with no published literature around the use of special constables as a policing resource in the COVID-19 pandemic, it's difficult to conclude whether special constables were used effectively to help police the pandemic and/or build public confidence.

Research has highlighted not only difficulties policing the COVID-19 pandemic, but also how anxiety and stress increased among serving officers. However, special constables were not included in this research, creating a knowledge gap.

Aim

To critically analyse the use of the Special Constabulary as a policing resource during the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic among the four Welsh police forces.

Objectives

1. To critically analyse the role of the special constable.
2. To research what impact COVID-19 has had on policing.
3. To research and analyse how special constables were used during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. To research and analyse special constables' perspectives of working during the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. To make recommendations for the future use of special constables and volunteers, especially within public health emergencies.

Research methodology

Primary data must be collected to gain data and information to answer the research aims and objectives. The researcher has concluded a mixed methods approach to collecting and analysing data is most appropriate for this project.

To collect data the researcher would be looking to only use special constables.

First data collection method

The first form of data collection would be to send out a questionnaire to special constables within Wales, including a mixture of open and closed questions. This is the easiest way to get a large number of responses. However, it must be considered that participant levels may not be sizable.

Second data collection method

The next form of data collection the researcher would look to carry out is focus group interviews or semi-structured interviews with special constables. This would depend on levels of participation in the questionnaire.

A semi-structured interview would be the best method for a smaller number of participants, as it's a flexible method to gather rich and detailed information through open and closed questions. This will then undergo thematic analysis.

Sampling method

As this research is specifically directed towards special constables who worked during the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, the most relevant sampling method would be purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used when the number of participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest is small – therefore, identifying and selecting those specific individuals is most effective.

Scope and accessing participants

The scope of this study is limited to the four Welsh police forces, because access to participants is simpler and the project is more manageable.

Access to participants will be enabled through:

- University of South Wales contacts and partnerships with Welsh forces
- the researcher's own contacts within the forces

Tags

- [COVID-19](#)