11/05/2026

The relationships between police officer help-seeking intentions and individual and organisational factors– a cross-sectional survey

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Understanding factors which may impact police officers' intentions to seek help for psychological distress, including help-seeking stigma, perceived organisational support, shame and leadership perceptions.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Leicester
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Police region	East Midlands
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	September 2023
Date due for completion	September 2026

Research context

The purpose of this study is to understand factors which may impact police officers' intentions to seek help for psychological or emotional distress. The study aims to measure how public and self-stigma around help-seeking, perceived organisational support and experiences of shame associated with experiencing distress and perceptions of leadership relate to police officer help-seeking intentions.

Previous research outside of the UK has found that police officers often believe that if they seek help, they will experience stigma from others and this is a barrier to seeking help (Fox and others

11/05/2026

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2012, Drew and Martin 2021, Rikkers and Lawrence 2022). This research will look at whether stigma related to help-seeking impacts UK police officers' actual intentions to seek help in the future should they need it.

Previous research has also found that some people who experience stigma related to having mental health difficulties and seeking help for these difficulties also experience feelings of shame (Corrigan 2004). Therefore, this research will also aim to find out whether police officers experience shame related to their difficulties and their need to seek help, and if this is related to their decision to seek help.

This research also aims to find out whether police officers who perceive their leaders as trustworthy and their organisation to be supportive and concerned for their well-being, are more willing to seek help. There has been little research into how such organisational factors impact help-seeking in policing, but there has been found to be some impact in military populations (Britt and others 2012, McGuffin and others 2021).

Research questions

1. To what extent do UK police officers intend to seek support if they experience emotional or psychological distress?
2. How are police officers' experiences of help-seeking stigma, shame, perceived organisational support and perceptions of leadership related to their help-seeking intentions?

Research methodology

Data will be collected via on online questionnaire which will ask multiple choice questions. Questions will be asked on help-seeking intentions, how participants would feel about themselves and how they think others would view them if they were to seek help, the trust they feel towards their supervisor, perceptions of organisational support, how long they have worked in the police force and their rank and demographic information including sex/gender, age and ethnicity.

Each participant will be given a unique identification number to ensure anonymity and to facilitate a request for withdrawal from the study up until the data analysis has begun. Participants will be asked to provide their email address if they wish to enter the optional prize draw or if they wish to be sent a summary of the results of the research. Otherwise, they will not be asked for information

11/05/2026

The relationships between police officer help-seeking intentions and individual and organisational factors– a cross-sectional survey

which could identify them.

Data will be collected via JISC, a survey platform which is compliant with university GDPR policies. Data from the online questionnaire will be downloaded onto SPSS and stored securely on the University R Drive on a university computer.

The first stage of the analysis will involve Pearson correlation analyses to determine associations between help-seeking intentions and the predictor variables.

The second stage of the analysis will involve a hierarchical linear regression analysis of the data. In the first step, demographic variables which significantly correlated with help-seeking intentions will be entered into the model, to explore their impact on the help-seeking and to control for the effect of these. In the second step of this analysis, the predictor variables which significantly correlated with help-seeking intentions will be entered.

Research participation

Volunteers are needed for the study. Any current serving UK police officer is eligible to take part.

To view participant information and access the survey, please visit JISC Online Survey.

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11/05/2026

The relationships between police officer help-seeking intentions and individual and organisational factors– a cross-sectional survey

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