

Can the use of technology create an experiential learning environment that can develop police officers' cognitive schema in relation to decision-making at incidents of gendered violence?

Research seeking to understand the impact that cultural schema has on police decision-making and the impact that a virtual reality learning environment can have.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Portsmouth
Principal researcher(s)	Bethan Shellard-Dedman bethan.shellard-dedman@port.ac.uk
Police region	South East
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2024
Date due for completion	January 2029

Research context

The Casey Review (2023) into the Metropolitan Police raised the profile of the issues women face in accessing justice, due to the culture within the police. While the review focused solely on the Metropolitan Police, it suggested that the issues it dealt with are much more widely spread.

Indeed, legal action launched by the Centre For Women's Justice (CWJ), IOPC investigations, and inspections by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) into various forces all support the Casey Review's assertion that this is a problem across England and Wales (CWJ 2020, IOPC 2023, HMICFRS 2023).

Police officers, although they are all individuals, are subject to police social identities and culture, which can indicate a proclivity to act in keeping with that culture (Cockcroft 2020, Workman-Stark 2017). This research will investigate how aspects of police culture impact on individuals' attitudes towards victims of gendered crime, as well as attitudes towards education, and determine how knowledge of the two combined might be used to develop experience-based training.

The focus here is to understand how officers' decision making is impacted by their experiences and culture, and then to use controlled training experiences to develop that decision making.

Research methodology

A series of semi-structured interviews will be conducted. These interviews will be about officers' recent attendance at an incident of gender-based violence. They will be asked to talk through the incident deployment log and first recorded officer enquiry log. They will be asked about the information they deem most relevant to their decision-making and how their decision-making is influenced.

They will be asked about what they noticed and remembered about the incident and how their perceptions of risk influenced their investigative decisions.

These interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) will be used to analyse and identify themes or patterns from the interviews. In conducting such research, considering the researcher's perspective is crucial. The research will be interpreted through a feminist perspective, embedding associated reflexive practice and acknowledging the relative positions of power between men and women in society (Kiguwa 2019). This perspective allows acknowledgement of the hegemonic masculinity present in policing culture and how this presents (Angehrn and others 2021).

These officers will also be asked to complete a survey. This survey will also be used in the final stage of the research. Its use is intended to track any changes in attitude through the process. This will be a paper survey that will be given to the participant after the interview, in order to ensure that the survey and interview are completed and connected to the participant. The officers will then be invited to take part in a virtual reality training simulation which uses the schema identified in the first phase of the research. After returning to operational policing and using the training, the surveys and semi-structured interviews will be repeated.

Research participation

Participants are sought from response police officers who regularly attend incidents of gendered violence. Please [contact the researcher](#) for further information.

References

Angehrn A, Fletcher AJ and Nicholas Carleton R. 2021. "["Suck it up, buttercup": Understanding and overcoming gender disparities in policing](#)". International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(14).

Braun V and Clarke V. 2006. '[Using thematic analysis in psychology](#)'. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Casey L. 2023. 'An independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service.' Available at Baroness Casey Review (met.police.uk) accessed 25/03/23.

Cockcroft T. 2020. 'Police occupational culture: research and practice'. 1st ed. Bristol: Policy Press.

CWJ, EVAW, Imkaan and RCEW. 2020. 'The decriminalisation of rape: Why the justice system is failing rape survivors and what needs to change'. Available at c-decriminalisation-of-rape-report-cwj-evaw-imkaan-rcew-nov-2020.pdf (fra1.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com) Accessed 01/02/24.

HMICFRS. 2023. Wiltshire Police. Available at Wiltshire - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk) Accessed 14/02/24.

IOPC. 2023. Available at Referrals analysis, Violence against women and girls - May 2023 | Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) Accessed 14/02/24.

Kiguwa P. 2019. 'Feminist approaches: An exploration of women's gendered experiences'. . In Laher S, Fynn A and Kramer S. eds. 'Transforming research methods in the social sciences. Case studies from South Africa'. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 220–233.

Workman-Stark AL. 2017. 'Inclusive policing from the inside out'. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.