

Exploring autistic police officers' perceptions and experiences of the PC-Sergeant promotion process

A project exploring the police promotion process, focusing on the rank of police constable to sergeant among autistic police officers.

Key details

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Police region	East Midlands
Collaboration and partnership	This project is supported by the College of Policing bursary scheme.
Level of research	Masters
Project start date	March 2024
Date due for completion	September 2025

Research context

The research around neurodiversity in policing is an emerging field currently focusing on the officers' experience from the broader neurodiversity perspective, as there is lack of literature focusing on the promotion aspect of neurodivergent officers (O'Reilly and others 2024).

It is crucial to have an evidence-based approach to understanding the issues affecting autistic officers across the country (Crane and others 2016) while conversations on the suitability of the

promotion process continue. The research will explore the perceptions and experiences of autistic police officers in regards to the PC-sergeant promotion process. It will formulate recommendations to challenge ineffective practices hindering progression and development of autistic police officers, and put inclusive practices in place by listening to lived experiences of autistic officers.

Research question

How inclusive is the police constable-to-sergeant promotion process for autistic police officers?

Objectives

- understand the perceptions and experiences of autistic police officers regarding the PC-to-sergeant promotion process, and any barriers resulting in autistic officers not seeking promotion
- evaluate the effectiveness of the support offered to autistic officers through the PC-to-sergeant promotion process
- formulate recommendations to ensure the PC-to-sergeant promotion process is inclusive for autistic police officers

Research methodology

A qualitative approach will be used, consisting of semi-structured interviewing to gain a deeper insight into personal experiences and insights of autistic police officers. This will provide rich and nuanced understanding of lived experiences, barriers and perceptions of the sergeant promotion process and how it can be improved (Nowell and others 2017). The research will employ a non-probability sampling method – a snowball sampling approach in the recruitment of up to 20 participants (Browne 2007).

Interviews will be conducted either in person or via MS Teams, taking into account geography/participant preference.

The research aims to ensure a balance in participants regarding males and females, with the goal of recruiting participants from a range of departments to gain a diverse sample and prevent any potential sampling bias or over-representation of participants, such as a higher number of male participants (Holmes 2020). Thematic analysis has been selected as the most effective data analysis method (Quinney and others 2016).

Research participation

The inclusion criteria is serving warranted police officers who are either self-identified or clinically diagnosed with autism, are in the rank of police constable and police sergeant, and fall into one of the below criteria:

- interested in becoming a sergeant or in the process of applying (to understand their perceptions/anything that may be stopping them from applying)
- those who are currently in the progress of their promotion journey, that is, have passed/failed part 1 (exam) or part 2 (interview, also known as the board, to share their experiences, anything that has been challenging or beneficial)
- those who have passed both parts of the promotion and are currently in the rank of sergeant (to share their experiences or anything challenging or beneficial)