Identifying red flag behaviours for police officer sexual and other misconduct

Using internal police misconduct data across seven police forces to identify red flags for sexual and other misconduct.

Key details

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Police region	South East
Collaboration and partnership	• Eastern Regional Innovation Network
Level of research	Professional/work based
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Research context

Following the Sarah Everard murder by serving police officer Wayne Couzens, recent reviews have criticised the police for having a culture that allows for misconduct to flourish (Casey 2023, Angiolini 2024).

The Angiolini Inquiry into the career of Wayne Couzens identified red flag opportunities that if pursued may have ensured Wayne Couzens was not a police officer by the time of his offending.

The issues identified were beyond cultural issues. Some police services were specifically criticised for failing to investigate aspects of offending which might have identified Wayne Couzens as an offender long before Sarah Everard was murdered. Since that case, several other police officer offenders have been identified (for example David Carrick, a serial sex offender). Other reports have identified widespread misogyny, homophobia, sexism and racism that exist within the police service (Op Hotton, Casey Report, Stephen Port investigation). There is a need for systematic research into red flags for police misconduct.

Across literature, there are two overarching issues:

- police services have produced internal reports on potential red flags, and these are not shared or accessible
- much academic work on red flags relies on publicly available information rather than full internal data, which weakens the findings

Current research is therefore weak on red flags for police sexual and other misconduct. This proposed research is a unique opportunity to use internal police misconduct data from seven police services.

The project aims to address the following overarching research question: What are the red flags for future police misconduct (sexual or otherwise) based on internal police data?

Research methodology

Working closely with single points of contact (SPOCs) across the police services, we are collecting anonymised data relating to all alleged misconduct across a five year period. For each case, we are accessing data relating to the alleged misconduct, officer characteristic and other relevant data. Exploratory analyses will take place in order to identify patterns in data and possible outliers with view of identifying red flags.