

How are police detectives psychologically and socially affected by homicide investigations?

This research aims to identify how police detectives are affected by their involvement in homicide investigations and how they cope with regular exposure to stress.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Greenwich
Principal researcher(s)	Quinn Longman ql6606b@gre.ac.uk
Police region	South East
Level of research	Masters
Project start date	March 2026
Date due for completion	January 2027

Research context

The primary aim of this research is to identify how police detectives are psychologically and socially affected by their involvement in homicide investigations. The secondary aims are to note what coping mechanisms they use to deal with any potential stress from their investigations and whether they feel that the current support provided to them to help build resilience needs to change. With these findings, the research hopes to find what is the best method to help improve and maintain police detectives' resilience to the stressors they may face in their work.

Homicide detectives are in a unique position as they are constantly exposed to potentially traumatic events (Dabney and others, 2013). Alongside organisational stressors, they face unique occupational stressors, including: confronting human suffering (Sollie and others, 2017), taking responsibility for the investigations (Nicholls and others, 2025), managing adjudication demands

(Kebbell and O'Kelley, 2007), and talking to bereaved families (Paine and others, 2025).

With these stressors comes the risk of negative psychological consequences like depression (Sherwood and others, 2019), burnout (Van Patten and Burke, 2001), and trauma (Porter and Gavin, 2025), as well as social consequences like increased family conflict (Craddock and Telesco, 2022). The coping mechanisms for stressors within the police heavily vary between individuals, with some using positive mechanisms through seeking mental support (College of Policing, 2018), while others lean towards 'morally grey' mechanisms like dehumanising victims (Roach and others, 2017) or negative mechanisms, including substance abuse (Lindsay and Shelley, 2009) and avoidance (Cartwright and Roach, 2020).

Resilience is a core aspect of being a homicide detective, as it ensures that they can fulfil their roles without causing them harm. It is essential to determine how the resilience of detectives could be improved (Regehr and others, 2021), so that they are more likely to use positive coping mechanisms.

Research methodology

Volunteering participants would be police detectives from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) who have previously or are currently investigating homicide cases. They can be from any police station within the MPS's area. The research aims to have between five to ten participants.

Participants will be asked to take part in semi-structured interviews, lasting around 45 minutes each, in either May or June. The participant can either meet with the researcher on the University of Greenwich campus or have an online meeting using Microsoft Teams. The participant will be invited to discuss how they feel they have been affected by homicide investigations, what coping mechanisms they use to deal with any stress they may face as a result of the investigations, and what they feel is the best way to build the resilience needed to cope with the stressors that come from their work. Audio from the interviews will be recorded on an encrypted mobile device, to later be transcribed for thematic analysis.

Consent forms and the demographic data of the participants (specifically age, gender and years of experience) will also be stored in a separate file on the university OneDrive. Only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to the data. The names of participants will be anonymised in the final dissertation using letters instead of their names (e.g. participant A, B, C, etc.).

If a participant wishes to withdraw, they will need to contact the researcher or their supervisor directly, and the researcher will delete all of their data gathered at that point. Despite the dissertation deadline being 9 September 2026, the data will not be destroyed until the 15 January 2027, to allow time to resit interviews if necessary.

Research participation

The only criterion for participants is that they have served at the rank of detective in the Metropolitan Police at some point in their careers, and they must either have previously worked on homicide investigations or are currently working on them. Participant information sheets can be given out on request as they have been approved by the University of Greenwich ethics committee.

Please [contact the researcher](#) for further details on participation.

References

- Cartwright A. and Roach J. 2020. [The Wellbeing of UK Police: A Study of Recorded Absences from Work of UK Police Employees Due to Psychological Illness and Stress Using Freedom of Information Act Data](#). Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, [online] 15(2), pp.1326–1338.
- College of Policing. 2018. [Responding to trauma in policing: A practical guide](#). College of Policing.
- Craddock TB and Telesco G. 2022. Police stress and deleterious outcomes: Efforts towards improving police mental health. Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 37(1), pp. 173–182.
- Dabney DA and others. 2013. [A qualitative assessment of stress perceptions among members of a Homicide Unit](#). Justice Quarterly, 30(5), pp 811–836.
- Kebbell MR and O’Kelly CME. 2007. [Police detectives’ perceptions of giving evidence in court](#). Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management, 30(1), pp 8–20.
- Lindsay V and Shelley K. 2009. Social and stress-related influences of police officers’ alcohol consumption. Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 24(2), pp 87–92.
- Nicholls R and others. 2025. [Homicides in England and Wales: The effects of victim and offense characteristics on case clearance](#). Homicide Studies.

- Paine B, Yankouskaya A and Sweeting F. 2025. [‘You can get a bit immune to it’: Emotional preparedness and coping strategies as utilised by English homicide detectives](#). *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 27(2), pp 199–209.
- Porter CN and Gavin P. 2025. [‘Constant pressures from all angles’: Understanding the mental health of UK police officers](#). *The Police Journal Theory Practice and Principles*, 98(2).
- Regehr C and others. 2019. A systematic review of mental health symptoms in police officers following extreme traumatic exposures. *Police Practice and Research*, 22(1), pp 225–239.
- Roach J, Cartwright A and Sharratt K. 2017. [Dealing with the unthinkable: A study of the cognitive and emotional stress of adult and child homicide investigations on police investigators](#). *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 32(3), pp 251–262.
- Sherwood L and others. 2019. Identifying the key risk factors for adverse psychological outcomes among police officers: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 32(5), pp 688–700.
- Sollie H, Kop N and Euwema MC. 2017. [Mental resilience of crime scene investigators: How police officers perceive and cope with the impact of demanding work situations](#). *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 44(12), pp 1580–1603.
- Van Patten IT and Burke TW. 2001. [Critical incident stress and the child homicide investigator](#). *Homicide Studies*, 5(2), pp 131–152.