

Home Office Police Front Line Review 2018/2019

Key themes in qualitative research projects with police forces in England and Wales

APPENDIX I

Introduction

This paper provides a high-level overview of the methodologies used in the qualitative research undertaken with police forces that informed the paper.

The key themes outlined in the paper are drawn from the findings of qualitative data collection and analysis across 11 projects completed between June 2016 and January 2019. 10 of the 11 projects underwent ethical review and clearance with the University of Northampton Research Ethics Committee and 1 project was reviewed and cleared by the University of Leicester Research Ethics Committee. Each of the projects adheres to the same data protection legislation and protocol; in particular, all participants were given information about their involvement in the research and gave their informed consent. Data is held securely in encrypted files in the systems administered by the University of Northampton, only accessible by the researchers named in each project.

The project reports are confidential; however, forces have agreed to the findings being used to inform academic, policy and practice improvement, with assurances of anonymity in publicly available documents. A brief description of each project methodology is provided below.

For the purpose of informing the Front Line Review with qualitative insights, the findings from qualitative data and analysis was used, and the quantitative results were not.

Methods

This paper draws upon qualitative research projects, which predominantly use semi-structured interviews for data collection, but also draw upon focus groups and online surveys where appropriate. All participation was voluntary and was not incentivised through payment or rewards. Sampling was designed based on the research aims and questions for each project and employed a 'self-selection' model, where invitations to participate in the research project were sent to, shared with and/or verbally communicated with those individuals and roles appropriate to the area of study.

In terms of analysis of data, apart from one project which used grounded theory (Glaser, 1992), thematic analysis was used. This means interview transcripts and focus group transcripts were thematically analysed involving six steps: 'familiarisation' through reading and re-reading transcripts, 'code generation', 'theme identification', 'review' of themes and codes, 'labelling themes' and 'report writing' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For open-text responses within online surveys, each response was given a descriptive code, codes were themed and categorised into labelled themes. Thematic analysis undertaken in this way enables the language to remain relevant and reflective of participants perceptions and experience and to fairly reflect the breadth and depth of data collected.

Brief Project Descriptions

- 1) A qualitative study of frontline experiences in one medium-size police force in England, exploring workload, wellbeing, support and partnership working. This project was undertaken in 2016 and involved 37 semi-structured interviews with serving police officers. Participants included representatives from the following roles: Police Constable, Detective Constable, Police Community Support Officer, Control Room Staff, Detention Officer and Community Safety Officer.
- 2) A study in one police-force in England in 2017, exploring provision of support services, perceptions and experiences of issues affecting wellbeing and the organisational response. 103 officers and staff participated in focus group discussions. 1,269 participants took part in an online survey, which included a small number of open questions, enabling collation of descriptive responses in the participants own words.
- 3) A project undertaken in 2016 to explore the confidence of police officers and staff in their specialist roles. An online survey was conducted, providing open-text response opportunities for participants to describe their perceptions and experiences, addressing the processes, systems and cultural blockers to greater efficacy in role. In particular, the survey provided participants the opportunity to describe their skills, training experience and needs, and relationships between teams and departments which may enable improvements. 524 police officers and staff completed the survey across the five forces.
- 4) National surveys of Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers were undertaken in 2016, engaging 3,084 participants across all forces in England and Wales and again in 2018, completed by 1,829 Special Constables and 1,205 Police Support Volunteers. Both surveys provided open-text response opportunities to expand on perceptions and experiences in policing. Three reports have been made publicly available sharing these results, and two academic papers have been published, exploring the data in greater depth. Contact Laura.Knight@northampton.ac.uk for copies.
- 5) Research undertaken to explore perceptions and cultures amongst the regular, paid police service towards the Special Constabulary and wider volunteering in policing was undertaken during 2017 and 2018. The study utilised semi-structured interviews and an online survey. Data collection was conducted across five police forces in England and Wales, including large and smaller forces. 1,493 regular, paid police officers across a wide range of roles participated in the survey. 47 interviews were conducted with regular police officers across three of those five forces. The survey provided open-text response opportunities. The research paper is under review for publication. Please contact Laura.Knight@northampton.ac.uk for further information regarding access to the paper.
- 6) A study of workforce culture was undertaken with a police force in England in 2018, engaging 1,820 police officers and staff in an online survey and 56 police officers and staff in focus group discussions.
- 7) A research project was undertaken with five police forces, exploring perceptions and experiences working in specialist roles in policing. 601 police officers and staff participated in an online survey and 40 police officers and staff participated in focus groups.
- 8) A study was conducted with one police force evaluating the impact of an initiative to address workforce performance, effectiveness, resilience and wellbeing. 102 police officers and staff

participated in pre- and post-intervention questionnaires over an 18-month period. The questionnaires captured wellbeing measures, and open-text descriptions of key factors affecting performance, wellbeing and the impact of the initiative.

- 9) A qualitative evaluation of the implementation of mental health triage was undertaken with three police forces in England and Wales, exploring issues, barriers and opportunities to improving outputs and outcomes. 27 semi-structured interviews were conducted with police officers and staff from relevant partner agencies. A paper drawing upon this data is currently being reviewed for a Special Edition for the Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, please contact Laura.Knight@northampton.ac.uk for information about the release of this paper.

- 10) Qualitative research was undertaken with Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers across three police forces in England and Wales, exploring perceptions and experiences in policing culture, relationships with regular, paid police officers and staff, skills, activities and impact on police service provision. 74 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers. Two peer-review publications are available, please contact Laura.Knight@northampton.ac.uk for copies.

- 11) A PhD case study of one police force in England sought to explore police cultures, community policing, legitimacy and procedural justice, completed in 2017. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. 78 people participated in the study, comprising 31 interviews with police officers, 32 interviews with community members and three focus groups with 15 individuals. The grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992) was used in analysis of the data, which involves the rigorous use of tools to ensure a reliable connection between the data collected and theory developed (Bryman, 2004:273).

Papers published related to the above projects:

Britton, I. and Callender, M. (2018). Strategic direction and leadership in the Special Constabulary. In: K. Bullock and A. Millie, eds. *The Special Constabulary: historical context, international comparisons and contemporary themes*. Abingdon: Routledge, 149–168.

Britton, I, Wolf, R. and Callender, M. (2018) A comparative case study of Reserve Deputies in a Florida sheriff's office and Special Constables in an English police force. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, 20, (4), 259-271.

Callender, M., Cahalin, K., Cole, S., Hubbard, L. and Britton, I. (2018). 'Understanding the Motivations, Morale, and Retention of Special Constables: Findings from a National Survey.' *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*.

Callender, M., Pepper, M., Cahalin, K. and Britton, I. (2018). 'Exploring the police support volunteer experience: findings from a national survey.' *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy*. DOI: [10.1080/10439463.2018.1432613](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1432613)

References

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Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. (2nd Ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.



Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*. Mill Valley, California: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Tracy, S.J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

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