

Written evidence submitted by the University of Portsmouth (COR0227)

Police preparedness and response to Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

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Background and aims of the research

1. In an innovative collaboration between the University of Portsmouth and Hampshire Constabulary, this research considers the impact of pandemic policing on the police and the public. Funded by the ESRC as part of UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19, it seeks to analyse the experiences of police officers and police leaders in exceptional circumstances and to explore the physical and psychological challenges of pandemic policing. This knowledge will provide evidence of i) organisational resilience, risk identification and effective decision-making, ii) strategies for the maintenance of future service delivery and iii) the impact of pandemic policing on police wellbeing. The research will also consider how the worldviews of individuals influence their perceptions of COVID-19 restrictions, their willingness to comply and key drivers of compliance/non-compliance which will shape the medium-long term police response. This knowledge will provide evidence of iv) effective policing in a crisis, v) public satisfaction/confidence in the police, vi) whether and for how long the public are willing to suspend their civil liberties and vii) factors that underlie any social/spatial variability. The link between perceptions of police legitimacy and willingness to comply means this understanding is crucial. Research findings will be scaled up into evidenced-based policing policies/practices nationally and its impact assessed and practices modified over the period of the crisis and beyond.

Key findings

1. Police staff are more positive than police officers about leadership, communications and flexibility within their organisation.
2. When considering scores on wellbeing, police staff scored most highly followed by police community support officers with police officers having the lowest scores on wellbeing. There was a link between a longer length of service in the police and lower perceptions of wellbeing.
3. Those in more senior ranks in the police felt most positively about their safety and these perceptions fell in a linear progression down to the lowest rank of Constable.
4. Those in more senior ranks in the police felt most positively about their sense of 'belonging' and these perceptions fell in a linear progression down to the lowest rank of Constable.
5. In free text comments, police officers and staff expressed most positivity about changes to home working and the flexibility that brought plus the higher threshold

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to deploy to incidents. Police officers and staff felt that the changed practices working least well were social distancing in offices, single crewing, IT support and for some, the adverse impacts arising from working at home.

To Note

2. The research project also incorporates 80 interviews with the police and public, two public surveys examining public compliance and perceptions of policing, analysis of police body worn video footage of COVID-19 breaches, video diaries from police officers on the frontline and focus groups with senior police leaders. Results from these aspects of the project are currently being analysed and will be forthcoming soon. These focus on such issues as PPE, deployment, public perceptions of policing, police wellbeing, home working and enforcement.

Methods

3. This submission focuses upon initial descriptive findings from an online survey distributed to Hampshire Constabulary police officers and staff (n=5077) for one month from the 7th July 2020. 1523 responses were received, representing a 30% response rate. The primary role of respondents included: 626 Police Officers, 845 Police Staff and 40 PCSOs. A Principal Component Analysis of the quantitative elements of the survey (52 items) extracted 7 different Components with excellent internal consistency: Leadership and Safety ($\alpha = .952$), Line Management ($\alpha = .907$), Communications ($\alpha = .909$), Belonging ($\alpha = .821$), Wellbeing ($\alpha = .759$), Flexible Response to COVID=19, ($\alpha = .804$) and PPE ($\alpha = .790$).

Body of evidence

4. Overall, respondents had fairly neutral or positive scores in the different components relating to Hampshire Constabulary's response to COVID-19 as well as in their reported levels of belonging and wellbeing. However, there were some important differences in the experience of policing the pandemic, especially amongst police staff and police officers:

- Police staff perceived 'Leadership and Safety' most positively overall compared to police officers and had felt safer conducting their role.
- Police staff rated 'Communications' higher than police officers did, and were therefore more likely to feel for instance that the Communications from Hampshire Constabulary had been relevant and useful to them, and knew where to get appropriate support for their health and wellbeing.
- On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being the most negative with regards to their own wellbeing and 5 being the most positive) police officers had the lowest 'Wellbeing' scores (M=3.17, SD=0.86), followed by Police Community Support Officers (M=3.27, SD=0.76) with police staff scoring M=3.35 (SD=0.87). The assumption can therefore be made that officers' wellbeing was *most* likely to have been impacted by the pandemic.

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- Police staff had better perceptions of Hampshire Constabulary's 'Flexible response to COVID-19' compared to police officers, which suggests that police staff experienced more adaptability to the pandemic situation and were more satisfied with the Constabulary's response to the crisis.

5. These differences amongst police staff and police officers may indicate that Hampshire Constabulary's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was slightly better suited to roles within police staff compared to police officers. This could be explained by the fact that they were likely to have more flexibility working from home, and did not have additional risks to take into consideration, such as working closely with the public and enforcing the new and changing legislation.

There were also differences in experiences amongst the different police ranks:

- There is a linear relationship between scores on 'Leadership and safety' at Hampshire Constabulary and rank. Essentially, the higher rank, the higher the average mean score in this component, starting at Constables who scored an average of $M = 3.21$ ($SD = 0.83$) and ending with Inspectors who scored an average of $M = 3.63$ ($SD = 0.67$).
- This type of linear relationship is also observed on the 'Belonging' component, where respondents in the higher ranks had higher feelings of belonging. However, this was not the case for wellbeing, which was not noticeably different amongst ranks.

6. The length of time spent working for Hampshire Constabulary appeared to be relevant across most components, with respondents who had spent less time working in their police role having a better perception of Hampshire Constabulary's response to COVID-19, which might suggest stronger flexibility and adaptability.

- Respondents working for the force for lesser periods of time rated the 'Flexible response to COVID-19' higher, as well as 'Leadership and Safety'.
- Respondents working for the police for longer periods of time had lower 'Wellbeing' scores, which could suggest the accumulative effect of stress from longer periods of service.

Other findings of potential interest include:

- There were differences in responses as a function of the respondent's age. For instance, the older the respondents were, the more likely they were to perceive Hampshire Constabulary's leadership positively and feel safe in their role. However, this could also be because older participants would be more likely to be in leadership roles.
- Personal vulnerabilities did not appear to influence responses to the different components, however the presence of other vulnerabilities within respondents' households appeared to be related to scores on the 'Wellbeing' and 'Belonging'

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components. Those exposed to other vulnerabilities in the householders had lower 'Wellbeing' and 'Belonging' scores.

- Similarly, participants with caring responsibilities had lower scores across most components compared to those who had no caring responsibilities. This was especially the case for 'Wellbeing', which suggests that caring for children or adults adds increased pressure on the individual, which causes overall wellbeing to be impacted.

To Note

7. Further inferential statistical analysis is planned (linear regression modelling) which will allow us to evaluate in more detail the combined influence of personal characteristics (e.g. gender, age, role) in explaining variability in Component scores such as 'Wellbeing', 'Belonging' and perceptions towards 'Communication' during the Pandemic.

8. Additionally, respondents to the survey answered two further 'free text' questions about Hampshire Constabulary's changed practices during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2,438 of these comments have been coded with the following results:

Table 1. Top 5 practices working well and top 5 practices not working well

Practices working well	Count of responses		Practices not working well	Count of responses
Home working	675		Social distancing in offices	148
IT (for home working)	252		Single crewing	146
Greater flexibility	164		IT capacity and support (re home working)	71
Higher threshold to deploy	161		Home working (unfairness, unproductive etc)	60
Cleanliness and hygiene	96		Lack of contact with team	46

The findings indicate that changes to working practices have had markedly different impacts depending on the circumstances of individual staff and officers (e.g. their ability to work from home) and their role (e.g. changes to deployment for frontline officers).

Summary

9. In summary, the respondents to this survey were generally positive about the response of Hampshire Constabulary to the policing of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were however differences between those who were able to work from home and those who were not in terms of perceptions of safety and wellbeing. Issues of staff resilience and wellbeing need to be closely monitored as the pandemic continues and as fatigue becomes more prevalent. Early analysis of data from video diaries from police officers indicates that wellbeing is a concern, of both officers and indeed the public.

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