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Introduction to *Salus Journal*

We are delighted to present *Salus Journal* vol 10, no 2. It has been a challenging year for researchers around the world, especially given the newfound opportunities and vulnerabilities in security, influenced in part by the pandemic context. This issue has important contributions which promote the safety, security, and wellbeing of people around the world, and advances knowledge for the public good. This issue contains studies ranging from retail crime in the COVID-19 pandemic by Donald Meyerhoff, a review of evidence-based policing by Garth den Heyer, an investigation of cyber-policing in Nigeria by Usman Adekunle Ojedokun and Samson Imoleayo Oshilaja, reflections on Freedom of Information by Mehzeb Chowdhury, opioid affects by Weiss et al, and a book review by Samantha Jones.

While the scope and intent of *Salus Journal* remains the same, the journal has undergone several changes this year in association with the appointment of the new Joint Editors-in-Chief: Dr Kristy Campion and Dr Jamie Ferrill. Dr Kristy Campion is a terrorism and security studies scholar, with a research focus domestic and transnational threats to Australian security. Dr Jamie Ferrill is political sociologist, with a research focus on national and economic security threats such as money laundering.

We are embarking on an ambitious renewal project of *Salus Journal*, with a new journal title page, website, and editorial board. We thank our departing editorial board members for their service over the years, and our continuing editorial members for their continued support of *Salus Journal*. We also welcome new editorial board members to contribute to our international community of research excellence:

Professor Christian Leuprecht, Queens University

Professor Debra Smith, Victoria University

Associate Professor Kelly Sundberg, Mount Royal University

Dr Benjamin Lee, University of St Andrews

We look forward to working with you all in the coming years.

After ten years of support for *Salus Journal*, we must advise that Kellie Smyth, the Production Editor, has retired from her position. Kellie played an important role in the creation of the journal and was an influential part of the production process. Her diligence and patience over the years has supported academic excellence, and scholars around the world, in a direct and meaningful way. We thank Kellie for her work and wish her all the best for the future. We welcome Mark Filmer as the new Production Editor of *Salus Journal*. Mark Filmer is the Research Editor at Charles Sturt University. He has extensive experience in print media and communications. He is an award-winning journalist, author of *Three Steel Teeth: Wide Comb Shears and Woolshed Wars*, and a professional member of the Institute of Professional Editors.

Finally, this edition – like all editions – is only made possible through the tireless work of our community of peer reviewers. We thank our peer reviewers for their continued support and commitment to research excellence.

Joint Editors-in-Chief,

Dr Kristy Campion & Dr Jamie Ferrill

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Retail Crime – A Perfect Storm

Donald Meyerhoff

ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in crime and theft aimed at retail establishments. Often these events involve organised groups that systematically steal and sell in-demand items. More recently, there has also been an increase in crowd or mob-based looting events, presenting merchants with overwhelming circumstances outside of their ability to control. This study examines various influences that contribute to this dilemma. Factors commonly believed to contribute to theft and looting that are discussed include adjustments made in criminal charging and prosecution of retail thefts, current public events focusing on police violence, prosecutorial reforms, and the impact of COVID-19 on law enforcement responses.

Keywords: *organised retail crime, police reform, COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, crimes such as theft, larceny, and petty theft against retail businesses have escalated in several cities across the United States (NRF, 2021). Within this timeframe, the US has experienced a pandemic, changes to policing, and major legal reforms at state and local jurisdictional levels. Each of these factors has been linked to increased thefts associated with organised retail crime (NRF, 2021). Political influences that impact local criminal justice practices are attributable as well.

Within 2021 alone, there have been reports of flash mobs, up to eighty individuals at a time, entering retail stores in major cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco and stealing up to $380,000 worth of merchandise (Charles Grassley to Merrick Garland, December 21, 2021 [Letter]). These group and crowd-based organised incidents have also been experienced elsewhere throughout the country. The incidents appear to have been well organised and planned. These are a few examples of spreading retail theft costing business owners millions of dollars, with downstream costs being passed on through insurance premiums and increased sales prices.

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To better understand the underlying contributing factors, the author will review relevant academic journals, technical reports, and city crime statistics. Current news media articles will also be consulted for statements and other relevant, timely data to provide a contemporary context of the phenomena. A brief correlative analysis between these factors will also be conducted to identify potential causal relationships. Cities of focus in this study are based on the top ten, as identified in the National Retail Federation's report on retail security and organised retail crime (2021). Statistical data from cities included in the top ten index are Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Chicago. Each of these cities has experienced increases in organised retail theft within the past two years. A closer examination of possible attributes and factors associated with organised retail theft follows.

Attributes and Factors of Increased Retail Theft

Factors and attributes associated with retail theft and organised crime include the impact of retail theft, looting and violence, the characterisation of law enforcement and resultant operational constraints, the impact of the pandemic on calls for service, and state and local government changes in arrests and prosecutions. Each will be covered in detail to help understand the overall impacts and contributing factors of retail theft.

The Impact of Retail Theft

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) database provides retail theft statistics from 2018 to 2020. The categories of data representing traditional retail spaces are a subset of an overall dataset reflecting theft and larceny in general. The following retail-related theft and larceny data were obtained by filtering out non-relevant categories, such as thefts from homes, campgrounds, garages, restaurants, etc. (see **Table 1**). This data does not account for retail theft not reported to law enforcement agencies or agencies not reporting such crime data.

Table 1

UCR-Based Retail Theft Data from 2018 to 2020

Retail Category	Number	Retail Category	Number
2020 Incidents		2019 Incidents	
Department/Discount Store	264296	Department/Discount Store	294757
Grocery Store	134759	Convenience Store	90732
Convenience Store	105885	Specialty Store	83433
Specialty Store	82843	Shopping Mall	23838
Drug Store/Doctors Office/Hospital	30605	Drug Store/Doctors Office/Hospital	28299

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Shopping Mall	16737	Shopping Mall	23838
Number of Incidents	635125	Number of Incidents	544897
Total Thefts/Larcenies	2621464	Total Thefts/Larcenies	2431484
Percentage of overall Thefts/Larcenies	24%	Percentage of overall Thefts/Larcenies	22%

Retail Category	Number
2018 Incidents	
Department/Discount Store	248388
Grocery Store	103510
Convenience Store	71249
Specialty Store	66894
Drug Store/Doctors Office/Hospital	24240
Shopping Mall	17738
Number of Incidents	532019
Total Larceny/Thefts	2029441
Percentage of overall Thefts/Larcenies	26%

Note: Data obtained from UCR system from 2018 to 2020.

From 2018 to 2020, retail theft represents anywhere from 22% to 26% of overall thefts and larcenies. What is also noticeable is the large increase in retail thefts from 2019 to 2020. This represents an increase of 90,228 thefts or 16.5% over 2019 thefts and a 19.4% increase over 2018 theft numbers (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2022a). Although the data do not reflect direct and indirect costs associated with retail theft, it provides the reader with an understanding of the growing severity of the problem overall. To provide an understanding of the financial impact, studies have assessed that retailers suffered losses from thefts of about $68.9 billion in 2019 alone (RILA, 2021).

Also proving to be a factor in organised retail crime is the availability of online sites facilitating sales of stolen goods. A study conducted and produced by the Retail Industry Leaders Association and Buy Safe Coalition (2021) indicates that a 61% correlation exists between the growth in online sales sites and the number of shoplifting events each year (RILA, 2021). The report further identifies the items commonly shoplifted are popular in online sales (see **Table 2**).

Table 2

Top Rated Items Stolen by Organised Retail Crime Gangs (NRF, 2021, p. 14).

Top Items Stolen by OCR Gangs	Percentage
Designer clothes	22
Laundry detergent	16.7
Designer handbags	14.8
Allergy medicine	14.8
Razors	14.8
High-end liquor	14.8
Denim pants	14.8
Pain relievers	13
Infant formula	11.1
Teeth whitening strips	11.1
Energy drinks	9.3
Deodorant	7.4
Contraceptives	5.6
High-end vacuums	5.6
Laptops/tablets	5.6
High-end appliances	5.6
Children’s toys	5.6

Many items listed in **Table 2** are commonly associated with convenience or drug stores. In California, where recent retail thefts have been some of the highest and most frequent in the nation at the time of this article, there is a reduction in retail businesses locations such as Walgreens, who are reducing the number of store locations (Garcia, 2021; Ravikumar, 2021). Other stores, if not closing, are reducing their hours of operation to reduce retail theft (Schuster, 2021). Small stores with less expensive merchandise than larger retail vendors are often hit the hardest due to their possessing high-demand goods that can be sold relatively quickly (Smith, 2018). Furthermore, the pricing of the merchandise often falls below felony cost thresholds, which were recently restructured in many states and now represent a much smaller risk for the offender. The affinity for lower-cost items on the part of thieves has been theorised by Clarke and Webb (1999) using the CRAVED model. According to the model, fast-moving goods must be concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable. Many of these types of goods are listed in **Table 2**. Goods fitting the CRAVED model are likely candidates for quick sale online. Besides the loss to the business owners, increased thefts also translate to fewer jobs and an estimated increase in federal and state income taxes of approximately $15 billion annually (Nelson & Perrone, 2000; RLIA, 2021). Additionally, increased costs are passed on to the consumer, with increases often ranging between 10 and 15 percent (Langton & Hollinger, 2005).

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Looting and Violence

Etymologically speaking, the term “looting” is derived from the Hindi word “lut”, which means to commit robbery (Dictionary, 1989). For clarity, the term “looting” in the study refers to theft during or because of civil unrest. The use of the term associated with military actions where soldiers are allowed to plunder or because of a natural disaster (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.) is not included in the study. Of additional interest is that fewer than 15 states currently possess statutes against looting in their penal codes, and such acts are typically charged as aggravated thefts and larcenies (Green, 2006).

A recent up-trending negative behaviour associated with retail crime is large group looting of stores and even freight trains. These violent acts have been experienced around the country within the last two years. Major retail stores such as Nordstroms and Walgreens are common targets. Freight trains in Los Angeles carrying commercial goods being shipped by carriers such as Fedex and UPS have been victims of large group theft. The act of looting has been associated with several factors, including periods of civil unrest and economic hardship.

An example of the negative impact of looting on local communities is that of the South Side of Chicago in 2020. As a result of the George Floyd demonstrations and civil unrest, 85 pharmacies were looted, and as a result, many closed for business (Fields & Shaw, 2020). Two of these stores were large chain retailers, CVS and Walgreens. Forty-five of these stores were in the economically depressed Southside of Chicago. Many seniors and others had to travel out of the area to obtain needed prescriptions and items, often from pharmacies with long lines due to the loss of other stores. In addition to increased travelling distances and wait times, there was the added overload associated with COVID-19 related demands on these retailers. The South Side was hit extraordinarily hard by the pandemic compared to other communities. A powerful tool in creating acceptance and potentially fuelling engagement in looting is the mainstream media’s presentation of groups and positions associated with socially charged events.

There have been several controversial racially-charged incidents where police officers have killed black Americans in the performance of their duties. In 2014, the Michael Brown shooting case in Ferguson, Missouri, took place. Subsequently, in 2020, a Minneapolis police officer kneeled on the neck of George Floyd for an extended duration, resulting in his death. These are not the only deaths of black Americans at the hands of police but are two of the most emotionally-charged incidents resulting in large-scale demonstrations and looting. Elmasry and el-Nawawy (2016) examined the positive or negative framing of events involving the group Black Lives Matter, the largest public voice surrounding the Michael Brown incident. The study looked at the *New York Times* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* newspapers, of which 65 percent and 79.5 percent of coverage, respectively, cast the group’s post event behaviour in a positive light.

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The responses about whether looting during periods of social strife is ethical vary, with individuals lining up in two main groups from either a legalistic or social justice position. Many who present an understanding or sympathetic view of looting and riots often recall Dr. Martin Luther King's famous statement, from a speech at Grosse Pointe High School in 1968, "A riot is the language of the unheard" as a foundation for public interpretation. After George Floyd's killing, some well-known public figures either publicly supported or rationalised support for the violence and looting (Brownhill, 2020). The focus of many of the statements made included references to the use of force against minorities on the part of law enforcement as well as the socio-economic disparities these communities struggled with on a continuing basis (Waldron, 2020). Looting is often seen as a response to systemic racism and the espoused long-standing effects of unjust capitalism (Armstrong, 2016). It is easy to see where a potential could exist for a popular de facto legitimisation of violence and looting, on the part of groups and individuals, both during riots and after the initial incident.

It is not uncommon for local government officials, in an effort to reduce further exasperation of a violent situation, to allow for sustained riots and related behaviours. Stephanie Rawling-Blake, the mayor of Baltimore during the upheaval over the death of Freddie Gray, allowed protesters to continue to loot and burn sections of the city, thus providing the "space" to do so (CBS, 2015). Similar allowances were made in Seattle, Minneapolis, and Portland during the reaction to the killing of George Floyd (Gary, 2020). Local politicians allowed for the abandoning of a police station and other buildings in Minneapolis allowing them to be burned down. In Seattle, likewise, a police station was abandoned to protesters, and a several-block area was allowed to be cordoned off for weeks. Local residents and businesses were left without basic protective services. Portland experienced similar actions. In all of the cases, local politicians refused to publicly chastise those involved in the riotous behaviour (Garry, 2020). The failure to identify criminal behaviour as unacceptable may reinforce and legitimise behaviours such as burning down government structures, looting, and other forms of theft.

Characterisation of Law Enforcement and Resultant Operational Constraints

Although the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to negative impacts on calls for service, other socio-economic factors (e.g., demoralisation of law enforcement, reduced budgets, and increased separations and retirements) are also attributable. The effects of the pandemic will be discussed later. After the death of George Floyd in May 2020, cities such as Portland, Seattle, and Minneapolis erupted into riots, looting, and arson. The news coverage was daily and all day for many weeks. An outcome of the social unrest and political pressure upon state and local government officials in many impacted jurisdictions was reforming law enforcement through various forms of defunding and implementing legal and operational constraints. For example, in July 2020, Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best advised residents the police would not respond to riot situations any longer (Krayden, 2020). She explained the new City Council Ordinance 119805 was going into effect. The new Crowd Control tool prohibited the use of less lethal weapons, including pepper spray, which is commonly deployed when crowds turn violent. This left people to potentially fend for themselves. Additionally, the national and international attention garnered support from well-known athletes and Hollywood celebrities. LeBron James, a popular basketball player, was active in calling for police reform (Faigan, 2020). Although a direct causality to a recent and very noticeable reduction of law enforcement officers can't be affirmed, there is certainly a positive correlation between the recent public disparagement of law enforcement and the restrictions placed upon them.

In a survey of 200 police departments across the country conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum and reported by the New York Times, numbers associated with resignations and retirements of police officers across the country from April 2020 to April 2021 were larger than in prior years. Nationwide retirements are up by 45 percent and resignations by 18 percent (PERF, 2021). The Seattle Police Department is an example of the impact and resultant level of service associated with reduced staffing.

The Seattle Police Department, in its 2021 annual staffing briefing, reported the annual budget was reduced by $46 million (Seattle Police Department, 2021). The department also faced a shortage of 150 police officers. Separations of sworn officers rose from approximately 85 officers to more than 180. Regarding the level of service, there were 221 days in 2020, 41 additional days over the prior year, when officers could only respond to higher priority calls resulting in extended periods for responses to retail theft. Many times, the victim was instructed to file a report online. This would undoubtedly have harmed responses and resultant prosecutions for retail theft-related crimes. The report also identifies problems with staffing of new recruits, the departure of existing officers, and extended responses to 911 calls due to increased budgetary constraints. Seattle is not the only department struggling with staffing and levels of service.

Since August 2020, Portland Police Department has lost 200 police officers and experienced record-breaking rates of homicides (Cagnassola, 2021). An example of the adverse impacts possibly attributable to low staffing is that homicides have increased by an average of 38 percent nationwide. However, Portland's increase is 83 percent, according to FBI statistics (FBI, 2022b). Other departments that have experienced increased crime along with decreased staffing and funding include Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City.

Impact of the Pandemic on Calls for Service

With the onset of the COVID-19 virus at the end of 2019, there have been reduced responses to low-priority calls for services across the country (PERF, n.d.). A shortage of officers is attributed to early retirements brought on by the threat of the virus as well as disputes regarding vaccination policies (Calvin & Sooner, 2021). Additionally, several officials link COVID-19 with increased organised retail theft and the sale of contraband online (Gibson & Cerullo, 2021; NRF, 2021).

The dispute between states, cities and police departments is ongoing and requirements are constantly changing. An example is when federal courts rendered a stay order regarding mandatory vaccinations in January 2022. However, this did not prevent many law enforcement officers from tendering early retirements and resignations before this date, which ultimately impacted workforce levels (PERF, 2021). An example of areas impacted by the ongoing vaccination dispute includes the Massachusetts State Troopers, who had dozens tender resignations before an October 2021 deadline for mandatory vaccinations (Franklin, 2021). There are many more examples of similar removals, resignations, and retirements in police departments across the country throughout 2021. To compound matters, departments measuring from 250 to 499 officers experienced a 29 percent reduction in hiring from May 2020 to May 2021, whereas larger departments, with more than 500 officers experienced a 36 percent reduction during the same period (PERF, 2021). These reductions will undoubtedly create future staffing problems. While disputes over vaccination requirements contributed to staffing problems and ultimately calls for service, many departments additionally imposed limited in-person responses for many lower priority calls (Jennings & Perez, 2020). Law enforcement agencies and departments instituted criteria and often limited response calls for retail theft incidents to those where the loss was $5000 or greater (PERF, n.d.).

Many law enforcement departments in areas including Philadelphia, Fort Worth (Texas), Los Angeles, Florida, and Nashville have implemented less risky response formats. The changes include issuing cites to misdemeanours to avoid prolonged contact and transport to holding facilities, telephonic reports, and not making arrests for certain crimes without supervisory authorisation (Jennings & Perez, 2020; Lum et al., 2020). The immediate effects of such changes, as they related to retail theft, were reduced responses, apprehensions, and ultimately prosecutions. These downwards shifts in calls for service due to pandemic-related practices have been attributed with an increase in group retail looting in cities such as Philadelphia (Cuellar, 2020). Another factor that reduces effective control of retail theft and related violence is the current trend in reducing the potential personal negative consequences of organised retail theft.

State and Local Government Changes in Arrests and Prosecutions

With the onset of COVID-19 there was, as noted earlier, a reduction in response to calls for service for non-violent misdemeanours and low-level felonies. However, in addition to modified policing practices due to the pandemic, there has been a movement among many state and local governments to reduce the number of arrests for non-violent property crimes. This has, in part, been accomplished by raising the felony dollar level associated with larceny and theft. The Organized Retail Crime Report identifies 29 states with retail theft limits of $1000 and greater (ORC, n.d.). Raising these limits widens the window of possible goods to steal and represents a reduced personal risk for potential criminals at the same time. Due to pressures associated with prison reform and disproportionate numbers of minorities arrested for non-violent crimes, many district attorneys have reduced the number of prosecutions related to retail theft in the past four or five years. Below are several examples of these current trends in how retail theft offences are perceived and how they have been addressed from a prosecutorial standpoint.

Chicago

Chicago's crime and prosecutorial statistics from 2016 to 2020 for felony retail theft show a noticeable trend. In 2016, there were 3,509 cases of retail theft filed with the district attorney's office (SAO Felony Dashboard, 2022). **Table 3** displays Chicago's case filings and acceptance rates.

Table 3
Filings and acceptance of retail theft cases in Chicago, 2016 to 2020

Actions Taken by DA	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Accepted for Prosecution	2866	3946	746	920	442
Declined	643	509	1606	1473	464
Percentage Accepted For Prosecution	81.0%	88.0%	31.7%	38.4%	48.8%

*The figures for 2021 were below 300 accepted and were not displayed on source graph

Upon inspection of the data contained in Table 3, three trends become readily apparent – the drop in the number of cases filed, the drop in the number of cases accepted and the increase in the percentage of retail theft cases declined. Even though 2020 exhibits an increased percentage of cases accepted, it is important to note the rather steep drop in the number of total cases from the prior year. This trend also correlates strongly with a publicly announced shift, on the part of the Cook County Prosecutor's Office, in the position on arrests and prosecutions for retail theft crimes.

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In 2016, Kim Foxx became the State County Prosecutor for Cook County. Additionally, in 2017, Ms. Foxx publicly declared that she would make an effort, through reduced incarcerations for lower-level offences, to relieve the prison system that had a large population and a disproportionate number of minorities (Jackson et al., 2020). As can be seen in Table 3, the number of prosecutions for retail theft has certainly dropped since her public commitment. However, Chicago has also been identified as the city with the third-highest number of organised retail thefts (NRF, 2021).

San Francisco

Like Chicago, San Francisco reduced the number of arrests for lower-level crimes to cut the prison population in line with California State Proposition 47, which was approved in 2014. The legislation raised the dollar level of a felony for retail theft to $950. California Penal Code 495.5 now identifies theft from a retailer under the $950 limit as petty theft commonly associated with shoplifting. Petty theft is still a misdemeanour and can be punishable via fine, jail time, or some form of diversion. However, the current district attorney's history in prosecuting crimes of retail theft below $950 has been less aggressive than in the past. Table 4 tracks the number of petty theft cases from 2018 to 2021 (SFDA, 2022). This view explains general upward and downward trends regarding theft over four years.

Table 4
San Francisco prosecution rates against petty theft crimes

Action Taken by DA	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total arrests made	221	240	105	62
Total charges filed	128	157	44	33
Discharged without further action	23	18	24	4
Percentage of cases filed	57.92%	65.42%	41.90%	53.3%

The data from Table 4 show the number of cases and percentage of charges filed in 2020, when San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin assumed office. The year 2021 numbers are small compared to prior years, undoubtedly due to the ill effects the pandemic had on modified policing practices. Without pre or post-pandemic prosecution data for District Attorney Boudin it is hard to see how his policies toward prosecution of shoplifters and other retail thieves would have impacted retail theft in San Francisco. Regardless of the lack of non-pandemic era statistics, there has been criticism by politicians and law enforcement of Boudin due to his support for non-incarceration for non-violent crimes (Smith, 2019). Boudin's opponents accuse him of sending a message of being soft on crime. Most

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recently, he has received increased criticism over the large mob store lootings that included as many as 12 stores and pharmacies on the same weekend in November 2021 (Colton, 2021). On a more positive note, these recent outcries for reform, due to lootings and other forms of organised retail theft, have resulted in a newly added California penal code section addressing organised retail theft, AB-1065 Theft: aggregation: organised retail theft (2022). District Attorney Boudin also publicly committed to addressing the organised retail crime problem. The language of the new penal code section addresses common attributes of organised theft, such as multiple partners and the resale of stolen goods. However, the $950 requirement remains in effect. Despite his attempts to reform his stance on crime, in June of 2022, Chesa Boudin was removed from the position of District Attorney by way of a popular recall vote by the residents of San Francisco. His ultra left-leaning views and actions were deemed too soft on crime for even his constituency, well known to be rather liberal.

Philadelphia

Table 5 lists the Philadelphia District Attorney's actions relating to retail theft cases from 2015 to 2021 (Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, 2022). The low number of cases associated with 2020 and 2021 undoubtedly reflects the impact of modified policing procedures associated with the pandemic. However, it is worth noting the years before 2020 exhibited a relatively high percentage of retail theft case that were dismissed without any further action being taken.

A factor associated with the increase in discharged cases post-2017 is possibly the policy set forth by Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner upon his entry into the position in 2018. Much like other district attorneys and county-level prosecutors, Krassner's messaging consisted of a need to decrease criminal prosecution and sentencing for "lower-level" non-violent crimes (Smith, 2019). The effect can be seen in a rise in the percentage of retail theft cases discharged in 2018 and 2019 compared to previous years. The messaging was so controversial that Krasner fired 31 prosecutors for not implementing his directions.

Table 5
Discharged retail theft cases for Philadelphia, 2015 to 2021

Action Taken by DA	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total cases	1997	1820	1460	2168	2337	105	62
Discharged without further action	926	932	935	1672	1769	24	4
Percentage of cases discharged	46%	51%	64%	77%	76%	29%	6%

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CONCLUSION

The available data shows that several factors have contributed to increased retail theft over the last six years. In the last two years, one of the biggest challenges has been reduced calls for services due to increased separations of officers and modified responses for calls for service due to the pandemic. This is, in large part, out of the control of many departments and government leaders. Ongoing efforts in developing best practices that keep officers safe yet provide adequate responses are needed. However, post George Floyd event sentiments and animosities towards policing, coupled with a lack of support on the part of local government officials and many in media, very well may have contributed to a widespread sense of the legitimacy of the criminal behaviour demonstrated during and after May 25, 2020.

Retail theft data from the Uniform Crime Database, various district attorney prosecution databases, and independent studies reflect a general upward trend in the number of retail thefts and the percentage of cases dismissed. In jurisdictions where this is apparent, there is a positive correlation in policies that reduce prosecutions of retail theft offenders. Additionally, many jurisdictions are experiencing an increase in large crowd or mob looting events which overwhelm retail business owners.

The solution to reducing retail theft is not as simple as merely placing more police on the street, although this is an essential component. It requires support for policing by the community and government offices and entities that decide what policing looks like moving forward. The ill effects of partisan politics and knee-jerk reactions have certainly been translated and demonstrated through the reduced staffing and hiring of first responders across the country.

About the author:

***Don Meyerhoff** is a national-level branch chief with a federal agency, responsible for the protection of facilities, employees and high value critical assets. Dr. Meyerhoff has 30 years of law enforcement and security management experience. He is also an adjunct professor with the School of Security and Global Studies, American Military University. He is a Certified Protection Professional, Professional Certified Investigator and Physical Security Professional with ASIS International, a Certified Security Project Manager with the Security Industry Association, and Security+ with CompTia.*

Note: The analysis, findings, views, comments, and conclusions are those of the author and not the United States Federal Government.

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Evidence-Based Policing: A Review of its Adoption and Use by Police Forces in England and Wales

Garth den Heyer

ABSTRACT

Policing is changing in response to increased demands from the community, the need to do more with less, fiscal austerity, the varying nature of crime, new technology, the loss of legitimacy, and the need for more transparency and accountability. One strategy that has been identified that could assist the police in responding to these challenges is evidence-based policing. This research examines the adoption of evidence-based policing by police forces in England and Wales. The research found that while most officers understand what evidence-based policing is and are amenable to its adoption and use, the methods that agencies use to communicate and disseminate information, internally, were inadequate and the current organisational structures cannot support evidence-based practice.

Keywords: *Evidence-based policing, police research, police reform*

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Neyroud and Weisburd (2014) noted that the period of investment in the police and policing in the United Kingdom and United States was over and the police were entering a period of austerity. An even darker picture was painted by Karn (2013), who claimed that the police were "facing major socio-economic, demographic and technological changes affecting contemporary patterns of crime", which would demand new forms of responses by the police (p. 5). Karn also warned that rapid changes were occurring in society, and there was more inequality and transnational crime. These factors have all placed pressure on the police to become more effective and efficient in delivering their services (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Guilfoyle, 2013; Savage, 2007).

One strategy that police forces have adopted to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their services is evidence-based policy and practice (Goode & Lumsden, 2016; Sherman, 2015). Sherman (2013) described evidence-based policing as a methodological concept that is strengthened by the "belief that greater use of research could help transform policing into a more legitimate and respected profession" (p. 5).

The movement for evidence-based policy and practice began in the United Kingdom in the 1990s (Lumsden, 2016), after it had been adopted earlier by the health, educational, and social work sectors. Following the election of the Labour Government, some government department reviews were undertaken to 'modernise' the methods that were used to develop policy and programs (see White Paper, 1999). The methods were updated and designed to support evidence-based decision-making and would be used in a new program that the government devised called What Works Network (Her Majesty's Government, 2011; Puttick, 2012). The College of Policing has, as one of its core functions, to "develop the research and infrastructure for improving evidence of 'what works' for policing in England and Wales" (College of Policing, 2020; Telep & Somers, 2019, p. 172) and is the primary advocate for evidence-based policing in the United Kingdom.

Although evidence-based policing has been touted as an approach that provides reliable and methodologically-sound evidence upon which decisions can be made, there are some arguments against it. These arguments centre on its use of a limited number of statistical approaches (Greene, 2014, 2019), whether it can be seen as a 'movement', a program or a tactical level methodology that focuses on 'what works' in policing (Punch, 2015), and whether police officers have the skills to understand its application and findings (Greene, 2014; Wood et al., 2017).

This article seeks to examine whether police forces in England and Wales have adopted evidence-based policing practices and to further earlier research undertaken by researchers such as Telep and Lum (2014) and Telep (2017). The first section of this article discusses the concept of evidence-based policing and whether its use improves the delivery of police services. The following sections explain the methodology used in the study and the results of an electronic survey. The final sections present an analysis of the survey and the relationship between the survey findings and the literature.

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICING

Evidence-based policing originated from evidence-based practice, a concept based on using quantitative methodologies and randomised experiments. It is a scientific approach that can improve the delivery of services because it de-emphasises intuition, unsystematic experiences, and general theoretical assumptions about the causes of problems (Evidence-Based Medicine Working Group, 1992). Evidence-based policing arose because the police needed a better way to reduce crime (Thacher, 2001).

Evidence-based policing emphasises the methods used to research a specific policing strategy and the subsequent interpretation and implementation of the research findings (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2016). It consists of two dominant approaches, experimental criminology and crime science (Brown et al., 2018). As envisaged by Sherman (1998), evidence-based policing is associated with experimental designs, particularly those used in medical science, such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs). Sherman's concern was the disconnection between the crime reduction strategies used by the police and the outcomes of these strategies and argued that such strategies could only be assessed using high-quality, scientific experimental research that could provide the best evidence to assist in police decision-making (Brown et al., 2018).

Police forces have sought "value for money" in the deployment of their resources and 'what works' in reducing crime (Greene, 2014), and this has resulted in an increase in the use of evidence-based policing. One of the benefits for the police in adopting an evidence-based approach to policy development is that their service will become more professionalised. It also raises the status of police research, as much of the research into policing has been criticised as insufficient (Skogan & Frydl, 2004).

The principles of evidence-based policing have been intentionally used in more than one hundred studies that have examined what works in relation to a wide range of topics (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2016). These topics have included hot spot policing (Braga et al., 2012), domestic violence (Davis et al., 2007), and countering violent extremism within communities (Murray et al., 2015). While the approach appears to have assisted with advancing our knowledge of policing in some ways, it is not only about creating more or better research for the police but is also concerned with how research is "received, interpreted, understood, translated, and implemented" (Telep & Lum, 2014, p. 360).

However, the theory of evidence-based policing does not consider how police forces adopt the concept, the organisational structures they use, or the methods they use to develop their policies (Greene, 2014). Nor does it consider the processes that the police use to disseminate information. As noted by researchers, police organisations are paramilitary (Waddington, 1991), with strategic decisions made at the top of the organisation, but with operational decisions made by supervisors and constables (Mastrofski, 2007). For police forces to benefit from adopting evidence-based policing, information and research findings must be disseminated across the organisation (Sherman, 2015).

One of the main limitations of evidence-based policing is that it is based on the findings of a limited number of studies, which generalises the benefits of adopting the approach (Eck, 2017). Furthermore, evidence-based policing is primarily linked to the strategy of Hotspots Policing and has not been used to evaluate other areas in policing, such as command structures.

Another limitation is that the capability of evidence-based policing in practice is narrower than initially conceived (Lum & Koper, 2017). One reason is that the research has focused primarily on crime control (Telep, 2017) and program evaluations (Greene, 2014). Limitations have also been expressed about the relationship evidence-based policing has with crime science (Brown et al., 2018). Both Haggerty (2007) and Punch (2015) claimed that crime science places an over-emphasis on crime control at the detriment of other services provided by the police and, as a result, distorts the knowledge base of policing.

METHODOLOGY

The research examined whether police forces in England and Wales were being influenced by evidence-based policing practices. The goal was to study whether these police forces had started to adopt the wider elements of evidence-based policing; for example, by increasing the education of officers, using research findings to assist with decision-making, and increasing the flow of information across all levels of their organisations. Two research questions that related to evidence-based policing were of interest to the study:

1. Have police forces in England and Wales been influenced by evidence-based policing practices?
2. How has this influence affected the forces' processes to use the findings from research to improve the delivery of their services?

The study was based on a 27-question survey that was approved by the Walden University Independent Review Board (08-26-19-3658472) in September 2020. The survey instrument was adapted from those used by Lum and Telep (n.d.), Telep and Lum (2014), and Telep (2017). The link to the survey was sent to an email list of 500 England and Wales-based members of the United Kingdom Society of Evidence-Based Policing (UKSEBP) by the society secretary on 10 May 2021. By 21 June 2021, 66 participants (approximately 13.2%) had completed and returned the survey. Membership in the society is free and open to any member of the police or any researcher who has an interest in research on the police (United Kingdom Society of Evidence-Based Policing, 2021).

A DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The survey's return rate of approximately 13.2% was low. However, as noted by Nix et al. (2017), surveys that are not undertaken in person have, over time, a decreasing number of responses and "a low response rate on its own is an insufficient reason to dismiss a study's merit" (p. 530). A similar study undertaken by the author (den Heyer, 2022) that examined the use of evidence-based policing practices in law enforcement agencies in the United States had a similar return rate of approximately 15.6%.

Characteristics of the Survey Respondents

The 66 survey respondents consisted of an array of senior ranked officers (18), supervisors (24), constables (10), heads of research and planning units (8), academics (5) and one person who worked in the Home Office. The respondents worked in 22 different police forces across all regions of England and Wales. When asked if they had heard of 'evidence-based policing', all 66 respondents said they had.

Evidence-Based Policing Knowledge

Following the introductory questions, participants were asked about their knowledge and understanding of strategies that had been introduced to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of police services and their understanding of evidence-based policing. The first question asked participants how they would define the term 'evidence-based policing'. Forty-three respondents (65%) said they would describe it 'as a scientific approach to developing strategies for the police' and 50 respondents (more than 75%) stated they would define the term as 'attempts to ensure that police practice and decision-making is guided by good quality evidence'. While 42 respondents (approximately 63%) claimed that they would define the term as 'looking for and being able to evaluate the best available evidence to underpin police duties'. Nineteen respondents (29%) said they would use the definition that was created by the England and Wales College of Policing and 13 respondents (20%) said that they would use the definition proposed by Sherman (1998).

The survey participants were then asked whether the eight response strategies that had been presented in the survey were very effective, effective, somewhat effective, or not effective for reducing crime and disorder in their areas. The respondents' answers to this question are presented in Table 1. Only six of the strategies had high scores (more than 50%), which indicated that they were very effective or effective. Preventive Patrol (about 37%) and Rapid Response (about 45%) were not regarded by the respondents as very effective or effective. The most effective strategy was Intelligence-led Policing, with 59 respondents (89.4%) stating that it was either very effective or effective, followed closely by Problem-oriented Policing with a score of 54 (81.8%). The lowest scores were for Preventive Patrol, Rapid Response, and Restorative Justice. When all three categories (very effective, effective, and somewhat effective) were added together, Problem-oriented Policing was considered the most effective, with a score of 66, followed closely by Intelligence-led Policing and Hotspots Policing with scores of 65. The lowest scores were for Community-oriented Policing (63) and Neighbourhood Policing (62), Restorative Justice (61), Preventive Patrol (58), and Rapid Response (57).

Table 1: Perspective of Strategy Effectiveness

	Very Effective	**Effective**	**Somewhat Effective**	**Not Effective**	**Number Answered**
Preventive Patrol	6 (9.2%)	18 (27.7%)	34 (52.3%)	7 (10.7%)	65
Hotspot Policing	20 (30.3%)	32 (48.5%)	13 (19.7)	1 (1.5%)	66
COP	20 (30.7%)	31 (47.7%)	12 (18.5%)	2 (3%)	65
Neighbourhood Policing	17 (25.8%)	23 (34.8%)	22 (33.3%)	4 (6.1%)	66
POP	19 (28.8%)	35 (53%)	12 (18.2%)	0	66
Intelligence-Led Policing	20 (30.3%)	39 (59.1%)	6 (9.1%)	1 (1.5%)	66
Rapid Response	8 (12.1%)	22 (33.3%)	27 (41%)	9 (13.6%)	66
Restorative Justice	10 (10.1%)	27 (41%)	24 (36.4%)	5 (7.6%)	66

The next section of the survey examined how participants gained information on new policing methods and strategies. The first question asked participants whether they had read any articles from academic journals, police practitioner magazines or websites in the past 12 months. Sixty-four respondents (87%) said they had read articles from these types of journals and websites, and two respondents (13.1%) said they had not. The second question asked whether participants had attended or participated in any professional policing conferences, other than training courses delivered by their own force, in the previous 12 months. Thirty-nine (59.0%) stated they had attended a professional conference and 27 respondents (40.9%) said they had not.

Of the conferences attended, the most popular was the Society of Evidence-Based Policing Conference, with 34 respondents (51.5%) stating they had attended this conference. Ten respondents (15.2%) had attended a conference run by the United Kingdom College of Policing and 13 respondents (19.7%) had attended a policing conference organised by a university or research institute. The third question asked participants whether they had received any formal training (from their force or otherwise) in evaluating policing tactics or strategies that were found to be effective in reducing crime. Twenty-nine respondents (43.9%) said they had received this type of training and 37 respondents (56.1%) said they had not.

Police Officer Education

Participants were asked two questions in this section of the survey about the education of police officers. The first question asked how important it was for police officers to pursue a higher level of education (university level education). Twelve respondents (18.2%) said it was extremely important, 15 respondents (22.8%) said it was very important, 28 respondents (42.4%) said it was somewhat important, eight respondents (12.1%) said it was not so important and three respondents (4.5%) said it was not at all important. The second question related to research on the police being undertaken by people outside the police, such as academics, and asked at what rank do you think an understanding of research undertaken by people outside the police about policing becomes essential for daily work? Fifteen respondents (22.7%) said an understanding was needed at the officer level, 15 respondents (22.7%) said at the supervisor (sergeant) level, 22 respondents (33.3%) at the mid-management (inspector) level, nine respondents (13.6%) at the senior management (superintendent) level, and seven respondents (10.6%) stated at the executive (chief) level. Twenty-six respondents (39.4%) said an understanding was required at all levels.

Research into Policing

The third section of the survey contained questions about research into policing and its practical usefulness. The first question asked participants to what extent they found information from research (conducted by universities or research organisations) regarding police tactics useful? Nineteen respondents (28.8%) said they found such research extremely useful, 22 (33.3%) said they found it very useful, 23 (34.8%) said they found it somewhat useful, and two respondents (3%) said they did not find it useful. The second question asked participants what they thought the balance should be between the use of scientific research or knowledge and personal experience in their day-to-day decision-making. The survey offered five categories for participants to base their answers on. Just under half of the respondents (30, or 45.5%) said decision-making should be based on an equal contribution from experience and scientific knowledge, while 11 respondents (16.7%) said experience should be more important than the scientific contribution. Twenty-six respondents (39.4%) said scientific knowledge should be more important and that experience should make some contribution to decision-making. None of the respondents thought that scientific knowledge made little contribution to decision-making.

Delivery of Police Services

The fourth section of the survey included questions about the force the participant worked for and how it delivered services to the community. The first question asked participants to describe how their force reduced crime. Twenty-one respondents (31.8%) said their force mainly used traditional tactics, such as Random Preventive Patrols and case-by-case investigations and 12 respondents (18.2%) said their force mainly used traditional tactics supplemented by Community-oriented Policing conducted by a separate unit. Two respondents (3%) said their force had adopted a departmental-wide Community-oriented Policing approach and 32 respondents (48.5%) said their force used a mix of traditional tactics and more innovative tactics, such as Problem-oriented Policing or Hotspots Policing. Only one respondent (1.5%) said the force they worked for mainly used innovative tactics.

Change Management

The second question in this section sought to gather information about change management in policing and asked participants what they thought the main factor was that inhibited innovation and reform in policing? The respondents expressed one predominant factor and four other factors that inhibited innovation and reform. The main factor was culture, with 56 respondents (84.9%) identifying this factor. The other factors were management (47 respondents, or 71.2%), organisational structure, and a lack of time (32 respondents, or 48.5% each). The other factors that inhibited innovation and reform and the number of respondents are presented in Table 2. Sixteen respondents (24.2%) claimed their forces were always introducing new methods and process.

Table 2: The Main Factors Inhibiting Innovation and Reform in Policing

	Number	**Percentage**
Culture	56	84.5%
Management	47	71.2%
Lack of time	32	48.5%
Too complicated	10	15.2%
Legal issues stop innovation and reform	8	12.1%
Organisational structure	32	48.5%
We are always introducing new methods and processes	16	24.2%

Undertaking Research and its Dissemination

The next section of the survey asked four questions about the undertaking and dissemination of research in the force the participant worked for. The first question asked whether their force had a research unit. Thirty-four respondents (51.5%) said their force had a research unit and 32 respondents (48.5%) said their force did not. The second question sought information on whether forces undertook their own research or experiments that used new policing strategies or methods. Forty-six respondents (69.7%) said the force they worked for undertook their own research and 20 respondents (30.3%) said their force did not. The next question sought to clarify why a force undertook their own research. The responses to this question are presented in Table 3. The most common reasons were to develop and use new operational tactics or strategies (44 respondents, or 91.7%) and to develop and use new administrative strategies or processes (39 respondents, or 88.6%).

Table 3: Reasons for Forces Undertaking their own Research*

	Yes	No
With the assistance of consultants or academics	44 (93.6%)	3 (6.4%)
The development and use of new administrative strategies or processes	39 (88.6%)	5 (11.4%)
The development and use of new operational tactics or strategies	44 (91.7%)	4 (8.3%)
The development and use of new weapons	11 (28.2%)	28 (71.8%)
The development and use of new uniforms and accoutrements	20 (47.6%)	22 (52.4%)
The use of new motor vehicles	16 (40%)	24 (60%)

*Each reason had a different total number of respondents. Respondents could provide an answer for more than one reason.

The final question in this section asked those respondents who had indicated that their force undertakes its own research, how the findings were disseminated to other police forces. Sixty participants answered this question, with the most common method being via professional societies or groups (12 respondents, or 20%), by presentations at conferences (8 respondents, or 13.3%), through word of mouth (7 respondents, or 11.7%), by publishing in practitioner journals (5 respondents, or 8.3%), and by using external media (2 respondents, or 3.3%). Nine respondents (15%) said their force used all these forms of dissemination and 15 respondents (25%) said their force did not use any of these forms or disseminate any of its research findings.

Acquiring Information and the use of Research

The sixth section of the survey examined how forces access new research findings and how such findings are used within the force. The first question asked participants about the processes and structures used in their force to access new information in policing. Nineteen respondents (28.8%) said the force they worked for did not have any processes and structures for accessing new information, 20 (30.3%) said new information was managed by senior management, 16 (24.2%) said the force they worked for had a researcher or research unit that handled new information, and 25 respondents (37.9%) said any member of their force could

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approach management about a new method. Eleven respondents said the force they worked for did not use any of these methods.

The second question asked participants how their force acquired information or gained knowledge about new methods in policing. Twenty-nine respondents (43.9%) said the force they worked for acquired information by sending officers and employees to training courses, 34 respondents (51.5%) said information was acquired from other police forces, 21 respondents (31.8%) said information was acquired from conferences, 16 respondents (24.2%) said the force they worked for gained information from practitioner journals, 15 respondents (22.7%) said from academic journals, and 23 respondents (34.8%) said from hiring consultants or academics. Twenty respondents (30.3%) said the force they worked for used all these methods for acquiring information.

The third question asked survey participants how information on new policing methods was disseminated throughout the force they worked for. The most common method of dissemination was internal media channels (42 respondents, or 63.6%); 16 respondents (24.2%) said they received this type of information from emails written by the Chief or Commissioner. Thirty-one respondents (47%) said such information was disseminated when the force they work for developed and implemented a new policy, while 21 respondents (31.8%) said the information was disseminated when a new strategy was developed and implemented. Three respondents (4.5%) said they received this type of information from channels other than those identified in the question.

The fourth question sought to understand how new policing research evidence impacted extant operational practices of a force. Nineteen respondents (28.8%) said the force they worked for was always adopting new ideas, but 23 respondents (34.9%) said their force waited until an idea had been successfully adopted by other forces, and eight respondents (12.1%) said the force they worked for did not adopt new policing ideas. Sixteen respondents (24.2%) said their force did not use any of these methods.

The fifth question in this section examined why information did not flow freely throughout a force and asked how the vertical channels in a force affected the diffusion of research or information. Thirty-six respondents (54.5%) said the rank structure made it difficult for information to move freely up and down the organisation while 12 respondents (18.2%) said supervisors and mid-level managers controlled what information was released. Another 18 respondents (27.2%) said the staff in their force were only told what management wanted them to know and 13 respondents (19.7%) said information flows were inhibited in the force they worked for because of concrete ceilings at different levels of the organisation. Five respondents (7.6%) said information did not flow throughout their force because of all these reasons and five respondents (7.6%) said information did not flow because of any of these reasons.

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ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

Research has identified three factors that can predict the successful implementation of evidence-based policing (Brown et al., 2018). The first is the strength of an individual's capacity to undertake evidence-based practice. The second is the level of organisational support for implementing evidence-based practice and the third is the level of an officer's education. Brown et al. (2018) claim that the age, length of service or rank of an officer is not important for accepting evidence-based policing. These findings are important in the context of change management because it means that evidence-based practice needs to be promoted to all officers and staff at all levels of the organisation.

Accepting evidence-based policing can take many different forms (Lum & Koper, 2017), and the receptivity to research by officers does not start when research is used in some way by an organisation. Instead, it is on a continuum (Nutley et al., 2007) and officers are receptive to research when they are aware of it and understand it and have a change in attitude towards research. The survey supports this literature with many respondents stating that they read either practitioner or academic policing journals. If readers of practitioner or academic journals analyse the information that is presented in journals, then they would acknowledge that more modern policing strategies appear to be more effective in reducing the occurrence of crime (Sherman, 2015).

Furthermore, most responses to the question about what rank participants thought that an understanding of outside research about policing becomes essential for daily work was that it was essential at all ranks. According to National Research Council (2004), most improvements can be made at the lower levels of an organisation because officers can recognise weaknesses in police service delivery. Education will increase an officer's analytical ability, which would assist them in interpreting the findings documented in practitioner and academic journals and applying the findings to operational policing (Telep & Lum, 2014).

The main barriers to adopting evidence-based policing are the culture and management in a police agency. Such barriers to reform may arise for several reasons and often include the control and dissemination of information (Chan, 1996). This problem was noted by 54.5% of the survey respondents, who said the rank structure made it difficult for information to move freely up and down the organisation; a further 18.2% of respondents said supervisors and mid-level managers control what information was released. These findings indicate that some forces do not appear to have structures or policies in place that formally disseminate research findings to personnel. Policing is an information intensive institution and needs information to make appropriate decisions, allocate resources, and develop research-based strategies and policies. Not having such information easily disseminated limits the capability of the police to provide equitable and just services to the community (Sparrow, 2016).

The literature highlights that the police are generally reluctant to change their structures and processes. This reluctance is often attributed to a lack of ownership of the change process (Duncan et al., 2001), or because police executives identify with the current structures and practices, even if how they are doing things is ineffective (Maguire et al., 2003; Marks, 2000; Mastrofski & Willis, 2010). However, the survey results indicate that change is taking place in the police with just under 70% of respondents stating that the force they work for uses traditional tactics that are supplemented by Community-oriented Policing that is undertaken by a separate unit or by using a departmental-wide Community-oriented Policing approach, or a mixture of traditional tactics and more innovative tactics such as Problem-oriented Policing or Hotspots Policing. Respondents also said some problems inhibited innovation and reform; the main factors were police culture and management. James Q. Wilson (1978), identified these same barriers, as did Janet Chan (1996) approximately 20 years later. This problem was also noted by Sherman (2015), who explained that the resistance arises mainly because the police see their role as being a craft and that it does not need scientific evaluation. Similarly, Skogan (2008) claimed that the barriers that impede change from taking place within police organisations were because of the internal processes that the police used.

According to Karn (2013), efforts by the police to become more effective in reducing crime are “few and far between” (p. 3). According to Knutsson and Tompson (2017) and Sherman (2013), as a critical mass of support for using evidence-based policing has been reached, it is now time for police forces to consider adopting the practice. This view appears to be supported by the findings of the survey. Although there are variations in some of the responses, the theme of the responses is that evidence-based policing is influencing individual officers, forces, and the delivery of policing services.

The survey results are also in line with the findings of Travis (2018), who claimed that “the policing profession has made strides toward evidence-based practices” and these “are truly impressive”. Travis discussed some earlier research projects that were based on random control trials (e.g., the Kansas City Patrol Experiment) but also noted that policing is approaching its next frontier where evidence-based policing will be important in assisting police forces to analyse data and develop new performance matrices that will increase transparency and public confidence in the police.

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CONCLUSION

This research has examined whether police forces in England and Wales have been influenced by evidence-based policing practices. There have been some calls for the strategies that the police use to reduce crime to be based on best practices and "on the best evidence of 'what works'" (Ritter & Lancaster, 2013, p. 458). What works in each situation, in a specific location, with a set number of resources can only be found from a comparative analysis of the application and evaluation of specific police response strategies and tactics. This analysis, however, is a more complex task than just one application of a strategy or tactic and must be applied a number of times under similar circumstances (Sherman, 2015).

The survey results identify that police forces in England and Wales are adopting aspects of evidence-based policing. While the low participation rates may be a limitation of the survey, the study's participants represent 22 different police forces in England and Wales. The results provide a foundation for further research to examine how police forces have adopted and used evidence-based policing and the research methods used by police forces to develop policies and strategies to improve their services.

Evidence-based policing is possibly a contemporary watershed in the development of the profession of policing (Dunham & Alpert, 2015; Lum & Koper, 2015). However, for the police to make the best use of the concept, police forces need to develop the organisational structures and process that enable information to be disseminated throughout their organisations and systems. This will ensure that information is made available for operational staff and will help improve the effectiveness of the delivery of policing services.

About the author:

Dr. Garth den Heyer *is a Professor with Arizona State University and Senior Research Fellow with the US National Institute of Policing. He is also a contributing faculty member at Walden University and an Associate with the Scottish Institute of Policing Research. He served with the New Zealand Police for 38 years, retiring as an Inspector. His main research interests are policing, counter-terrorism and homeland security, militarization of policing, service delivery effectiveness, strategic thinking, organizational reform and transnational gangs.*

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Cybercrime Policing in the Lagos State Command of the Nigeria Police Force

Usman A. Ojedokun and Samson I. Oshilaja

ABSTRACT

The criminality of cybercriminals operating in Nigeria has significantly expanded from the initially dominant cyber fraud to include other categories of cybercrime. Although the Nigerian Government has tried to contain the problem, there is a shortage of scholarly information on the specific role of the Nigeria Police Force in fighting this form of crime. Given this, the central objective of this study was to investigate cybercrime policing in the Lagos State Command of the Nigeria Police Force. It was exploratory and cross-sectional in design. . Data were sourced from 27 purposively selected police personnel using in-depth and key-informant interviews. The results showed that the Lagos State Police Command routinely handled different cases of cybercrime. However, exposure to professional training in cybercrime policing skills was restricted to certain categories of officers. Although different internal and external strategies were being used by the Police Command to combat cybercrime, the overall effectiveness of its personnel was being hampered by multiple operational challenges.

Keywords: *Cybercrime, Cybercriminals, Online Criminality, Policing, Lagos State Police, Command, Nigeria Police Force*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, cybercrime has emerged as one of the dominant crimes confronting many police organisations (Collier et al., 2022; Whelan & Harkin, 2019; Harkin et al., 2018; Wall & Williams, 2013) as criminals are increasingly using the Internet to commit a host of crimes, such as fraud, child pornography, drug trafficking, economic crime, and hate crimes (Cross & Blackshaw, 2015; Awan & Blakemore, 2012). Although the policing profession has always been evolving, the technological advancements witnessed in the past 20 years have accelerated that change and dramatically altered the landscape of crime (Police Executive Research Forum, 2014).

In Nigeria, the nature, dimension, and magnitude of cybercrime has expanded significantly in the last two decades (Ojedokun & Ilori, 2021; Punch, 2015). The activities of cybercriminals operating in the country have metamorphosed from the initially dominant online fraud to include other categories of cybercrime such as cyber bullying, cyber stalking, distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, identity theft, intellectual property theft, hacking, malware distribution, phreaking, revenge pornography, and software piracy (Adebayo & Ojedokun, 2018; Oyenuga, 2014). For instance, the official website of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was hacked by a group known as the Nigerian Cyber Army, in the build-up to the 2015 general elections (Alade, 2015). Also, a report by Kaspersky Protection Technologies indicates that over 9,000 people in Nigeria suffered malware attacks launched by cybercriminals in 2019 alone (Adepetun, 2020; Umeh, 2020).

The intensity, scope, and multisectoral deleterious impacts of cybercrime make it expedient to understand how the police force as the primary responder to crime events and the principal enforcer of the law in Nigeria is addressing it. Although the Nigerian Government has tried to contain the problem of cybercrime through the 2015 enactment of the Nigerian Cybercrime Act, by establishing the Nigerian Cyber Crime Working Group, and by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Microsoft Corporation among others, there is a dearth of scholarly information on the specific role of the Nigeria Police Force as a law enforcement agency in fighting this form of crime.

The pervasiveness of different forms of cybercrime is a new addition to the burden of the Nigeria Police Force, an agency whose effectiveness in tackling offline crimes has been consistently rated average (Ojedokun, 2021; Adebayo & Ojo, 2009). Moreover, the high digital divide and skills gap in the use of information and communication technology currently existing among Nigerians may also inhibit the capability of police officials to adequately investigate and prosecute cybercrime cases (Peters & Ojedokun, 2019; Obayelu & Ogunlade, 2006). Furthermore, the fact that some non-financially motivated forms of cybercrime such as revenge pornography, cyber stalking, hate crime, and malware distribution are increasingly becoming pervasive (Adepetun, 2020; Aderinto & Ojedokun, 2017; This Day (2016) clearly indicates that relying solely on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), a specialised government agency established in 2003, to tackle financial crimes in Nigeria including cybercrime, is inadequate. Therefore, it becomes important to examine the level of preparedness and operational strategies of the Nigeria Police Force in combating cybercrime. Against this background, the central objective of this study was to investigate cybercrime policing in the Lagos State Command of the Nigeria Police Force.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth of cyber technologies has significantly increased the workload of police personnel across the globe (Ndubueze & Igbo, 2014). Wall and Williams (2013) submit that cybercrime has become a part of the national security strategies of many countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, and the United States of America. Harkin et al. (2018) mention that many state police organisations in Australia have responded to the threat of cybercrime by developing specialist units. However, Dupont (2017) claims that despite the increasing recognition of the social and economic costs of cybercrime, it seems evident that the main beneficiaries of the increased public-sector funding to promote cyber security have been security and intelligence agencies rather than local police organisations.

Holt and Bossler (2015) state that cybercrime poses unique challenges to domestic and international law enforcement agencies because cybercriminals have the technical capacities to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries while also widening their victim pool to include all individuals with access to the Internet. Equally, Harkin et al. (2018) posit that the pervasiveness of cyber-enabled or cyber-facilitated crimes means that police officers must be ready to confront its growing relevance and the increasing public demands to respond to cyber offending. Furthermore, they argue that cybercrime will inevitably become an element of all policing as cyber is now crucial to the facilitation of different forms of crimes.

Whelan and Harkin (2019) say that the extent to which police organisations have adequately understood and prioritised cybercrimes and their level of expertise in dealing with cyber offences have always generated serious debates. The Police Executive Research Forum (2014) submits that local police agencies have not had adequate time to be fully prepared to identify their role in preventing and investigating cybercrime because it developed very quickly. Koziarski and Lee (2020) assert that adequate cybercrime training is paramount in ensuring that any police-led approach to cybercrime is properly executed. However, Holt and Lee (2019) and Bossler and Holt (2012) have separately linked police agencies' ineffectiveness at fighting cybercrime to factors such as their inability to acquire the necessary technological equipment essential for conducting adequate investigations, insufficient training, and difficulty in retaining officers who possess appropriate skills to combat cybercrime. Willits and Nowacki (2016) state that the institutional legitimacy of the police as an effective first responder will be negatively affected if law enforcement responses to cybercrime do not improve.

METHODOLOGY

This research was exploratory and cross-sectional in design. It was cross-sectional in the sense that data were collected from different individuals at a single point in time. The Lagos State Police Command was the main focus – it is among the 36 State Police Commands of the Nigeria Police Force. The command headquarters is located at Ikeja in the Lagos metropolis. This Police Command is primarily responsible for law enforcement and crime prevention in Lagos State. It is administered by a Commissioner of Police supported by Deputy Commissioners of Police and Assistant Commissioners. Although this Police Command did not have a special anti-cybercrime unit when this study was conducted, its selection was deemed appropriate because Lagos State is among the widely recognised major hubs of cybercrime in Nigeria (Ndubueze & Igbo, 2014). Therefore, the opinions of police personnel of the command on policing cybercrime were considered apt and important for a study of this nature. Both female and male police officials serving at the Lagos State Police Command of the Nigeria Police Force constituted the study population. The researchers had no prior personal relationship with the police officers who were involved in this study. Rather, access to respondents was made possible because the official request to conduct the research in the Police Command was granted by the Lagos State Commissioner of Police.

Data were principally elicited through the combination of two qualitative methods – in-depth and key-informant interviews. Regarding the procedure used for data collection, written permission was first sought from the office of the Commissioner of Police of Lagos State. After the request was granted, the researchers were directed to the Area ‘M’ Police Command and the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department because of its strategic importance in cybercrime policing in Lagos State, Nigeria. However, due to many bureaucratic bottlenecks and difficulties in gaining access to potential respondents at Area ‘M’, data were exclusively sourced from police officials serving at the State Intelligence Bureau, the Administrative Unit and the General Duty Section of the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department. At this location, different interview sessions were held with police officials belonging to the cadres of Assistant Inspector, Assistant Superintendent, Inspector, Sergeant, and Superintendent. Specifically, key informant interviews were conducted with two Assistant Superintendents of Police because of their seniority and years of professional experience, while 25 in-depth interviews were held with police officials belonging to other ranks. The purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents as they were chosen based on their knowledge and work-related experience on cybercrime policing. Some of the questions that respondents were asked during the interviews were: What can you say about the pervasiveness of cybercrime in Lagos State? What are the procedures being employed in policing cybercrime in Lagos State? How is the Lagos State Police Command responding to reported cases of cybercrime? How are the reported cases of cybercrime handled by the Police Command? What are the specialised training programs that are available to police officers in the Lagos State Police Command with regard to cybercrime policing? What are the challenges associated with cybercrime policing in Lagos State? What do you think can be done to enhance cybercrime policing in Lagos State? All interviews were conducted with the aid of a voice recorder and field notes.

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At the analysis stage, the elicited data were subjected to manual content analysis. The procedure essentially involved a painstaking transcription, detailed description, and careful interpretation of the generated data using the deductive approach. More specifically, data were thematically analysed, explored, and interpreted in line with the aforementioned study objective to tease out the emerging patterns. In addition, the verbatim quotations of some of the important responses given by the respondents during the interviews were done to further ensure the lucidity of discourse.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

International research ethics standards were carefully adhered to throughout this study. Ethical approval was granted by the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria before the study was carried out. Also, the permission of the Lagos State Commissioner of Police was sought and obtained before the start of fieldwork. Also, the consent of each respondent was sought and obtained before theyy participated in the study. The objective of the research was carefully explained to participants and they were also informed of their right to voluntary participation and to withdraw from the study at any time they deemed necessary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the major results from the study are presented and discussed along these themes: the types of cybercrime commonly reported to the Lagos State Police Command, the response of the Lagos State Police Command to cybercrime cases, training of police personnel on cybercrime policing in Lagos State Police Command, strategies being used by the Lagos State Police Command to address cybercrime, and challenges confronting the Lagos State Police Command in cybercrime policing.

Types of Cybercrime Commonly Reported to the Lagos State Police Command

Information was sought on the types of cybercrime commonly reported to the Lagos State Police Command to gauge the involvement of police officials in the investigation and handling of such crimes. The outcome of the interviews revealed that personnel of the Command routinely received complaints from victims of different forms of cybercrime. In one of the in-depth interview sessions conducted, a respondent said:

> ATM/debit card and online money transfer fraud involving the use of clone and dummy cards to extort money from victims' bank accounts are the forms of cybercrime commonly reported to us. There was a case I handled which was reported at my Command in which a call was put through to the victim that her ATM card had expired and that she should

> forward an SMS containing her bank details to a particular number that was sent to her. In less than ten minutes, her bank account was emptied by cybercriminals. (IDI/male/40 years/Yoruba)

A respondent also explained:

> I think hacking, online harassment, online banking fraud and identity theft are the most reported cases of cybercrime in Lagos State. We have had a case of a criminal hacking into a victim's phone to extract the victim's bank details which was later used for stealing money from his bank account. We later apprehended the offender by tracking his phone number and by also arresting a soft target (who was a person closely related to the suspect) who led us directly to him. That was how we succeeded on that particular case. (IDI/male/28 years/Yoruba)

Another key-informant described the situation this way:

> Cases of cybercrime that are commonly reported to us are basically ATM scam and identity theft/impersonation. These online bandits sometimes do extract or copy people's information including pictures, and then create a social media account or sometimes even hack into their victim's social media account. They will then begin sending incriminating messages contrary to the intent of the original owner of such an account. Sometimes they can ask the victim's online contacts to send some money to them because they are in an emergency situation or in desperate need of money. There was a particular case where a fraudster used the picture of a popular pastor to open a Facebook account and ventured into defrauding people both locally and internationally. After series of investigation and tracking, the suspect agreed to come forward after one of our men pretended to be a follower who needed special prayers. When he arrived, he was arrested and later prosecuted. (KII/male/55 years/Edo)

The submissions of these respondents indicate that different cases of financially-motivated and non-financially motivated cybercrimes including those bordering on ATM/debit card fraud, cyber bullying, cyber harassment, hacking, identity theft, online impersonation, and online money transfer fraud were the ones commonly reported to and handled by police officials at the Lagos State Police Command.

Response of the Lagos State Police Command to Cybercrime Cases

The intensity and scope of cybercrime are increasingly compelling law enforcement agencies in different parts of the world to innovate different institutional frameworks to tackle it (Whelan & Harkin, 2019; Wall & Williams, 2013). Therefore, it was

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considered important to investigate the response of the Lagos State Police Command to cybercrime cases. The respondents gave different opinions. One of the key-informants interviewed stated:

> Yes, there are different units that handle cybercrime in the Lagos State Police Command such as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, Special Task Force and the Special Fraud Unit. However, I believe the Anti-Robbery Squad handles most of the cases from the point of receiving such reports to investigating, arresting and prosecuting of suspects. (KII/male/55 years/Edo)

Another key-informant responded to the question this way:

> Yes, there are some of police units that are arresting and prosecuting suspects of cybercrime. They are also recovering stolen belongings where possible. Sometimes, they are responsible for tracking and intercepting cybercriminals from carrying out further attacks or damages. (KII/female/30 years/Yoruba)

One of the interviewees said:

> There is no dedicated unit to cybercrime in the Lagos State Police Command. However, the investigation unit of the Police Command and the Divisional Command handle reported cybercrime cases and investigations. (IDI/male/Inspector/45 years/Igbo)

A respondent also mentioned:

> Well, I will not say that there is a specialised unit that is solely dedicated to cybercrime. However, there are different means that are being adopted to monitor and handle cybercrime. When investigating a cybercrime case, the Nigeria Police do make use of some agents in the community to gather information and monitor the activities of suspects. These agents could be civilians or sometimes undercover police officers. This assignment could be handled by the Investigation Department or sometimes by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). (KII/male/55 years/Edo)

It is clear from the submissions of the key-informants and the interviewees that cybercrime and cybercriminal cases were mainly being investigated and handled in the Lagos State Police Command by some special police detachments such as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, the Special Task Force Unit, and the Special Fraud Unit.

Training of Police Personnel in the Lagos State Police Command on Cybercrime Policing

Training is among the major factors contributing to the effectiveness and service delivery capacity of police agencies and personnel. Thus, respondents were probed on professional training available to police personnel in the Lagos State Police Command on cybercrime policing. All the respondents interviewed confirmed that training on cybercrime policing was occasionally organised by their Command for police officials. One of the key-informants interviewed said:

> Yes, training on cybercrime policing is only available for officers in the special squad unit. There are some courses that they undergo to educate them on the current trends in cybercrime. It does not usually include every section because of lack of fund. Except one wants to sponsor oneself. The Nigeria Police does not sponsor officers for further education. Sometimes, we do hold preliminary lectures at the Area Command, but these are not enough. We were manually taught on ways of interrogating cybercriminals in Lagos. For instance, if a suspect is being intercepted and police officers check his or her phone. We were trained to check their phone contact to see if they have lot of foreign contacts. In a case where there are many foreign numbers in a suspect's phone, he or she would be asked to establish a genuine relationship with such contacts and the failure to do so would lead to his/her arrest. This is what most police squads use nowadays. (KII/male/55 years/Edo)

A respondent also mentioned:

> Yes, there are some specialised training programs that are available to police officers on cybercrime. We have the anti-fraud training course and we also received training on the modus operandi of cybercriminals. (IDI/female/33 years/Yoruba)

However, a respondent asserted:

> No, I have not attended any training on cybercrime and the reason is because I have not been enlisted to participate due to my educational qualification. (IDI/female/30 years/Igbo)

Another participant gave a similar response:

> No, I have never been part of any training because it is only senior ranking officers that are usually considered first because one's level of education is an important criterion in the selection for participation in such trainings. (IDI/male/28 years/Yoruba)

An officer who had participated in one of the organised training programs said:

> Yes, I have attended trainings on cybercrime policing. It was a conference which enabled officers build their investigative skills on crime generally, which also includes cybercrime. The training was conducted in Abuja. (IDI/female/35 years/Yoruba)

The above narratives point to the fact that the Lagos State Police Command is exposing certain categories of its personnel to some professional training programs on cybercrime policing by educating and equipping them regarding current trends in cybercrime, the modes of operation of cybercriminals, and the professional skills essential for interrogating cybercriminals. However, this professional training was restricted to senior police officers and personnel with higher educational qualifications.

Strategies Used by the Lagos State Police Command to Address Cybercrime

Operational strategy is among the major determinants of the success of any law enforcement agency. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to investigate the strategies used by police officials of the Lagos State Police Command to tackle cybercrime. The findings revealed that different strategies were being used by the Command to address cybercrime. In one of the interviews, a respondent stated:

> The Lagos State Government and the Police are doing their best to fight cybercrime by introducing different measures, some of which include organising public enlightenment and education for the purpose of detailing the antics of fraudsters and maintaining a stringent stance by ensuring that those arrested are prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others. (IDI/male/35 years/Yoruba)

In the words of another respondent:

> The State Command is employing the use of technologies that could be deployed to tackle cybercrime, such as tracking and intercepting devices. These are the ways through which police officials are monitoring and tracking down locations of cybercriminals. (IDI/female/30 years/Igbo)

A key-informant also mentioned this:

> Cybercrime is an international crime that cuts across borders. Therefore, the Nigeria Police Force is partnering with some international organisations like the CIA, FBI and the Metropolitan Police in tracking and arresting cybercriminals. (KII/male/55 years/Edo)

Another participant asserted:

> The Nigerian Police Force usually exchanges confidential details and information regarding cybercrime with relevant international agencies such as FBI and INTERPOL. (IDI/male/40 years/Yoruba)

It can be gleaned from the submissions of the respondents that the Lagos State Police Command is adopting different strategies to tackle cybercrime. Specifically, the strategies being used by the Command included conducting public enlightenment about the antics of cyberfraudsters, prosecuting cybercrime suspects, conducting surveillance in parts of Lagos State that are notorious for the activities of cybercriminals, using tracking and intercepting devices, and collaborating with relevant international law enforcement agencies such as the FBI, CIA, INTERPOL, and Metropolitan Police.

Challenges Confronting the Lagos State Police Command in Cybercrime Policing

The online environment where cybercriminals operate and their mode of operations are strikingly different from those of criminals perpetrating offline crimes. Therefore, information was gathered on the major challenges confronting the officials of the Lagos State Police Command in investigating cybercrime. All the respondents interviewed agreed they were confronted by different challenges while investigating cybercrime cases. A typical response that was given by nearly all participants was captured this way:

> A major challenge facing us as regards cybercrime policing is lack of equipment. Specifically, the technologies we have are obsolete and cannot be employed for efficient investigation. Another challenge is that social media platforms are also providing opportunities for cybercriminals to facilitate cybercrime. (IDI/male/45 years/Yoruba)

A respondent also described the situation this way:

> A problem that I discovered is the lack of database on people, culprits and cybercrimes. It is so hard to investigate this form of crime efficiently without proper digitisation. There are also financial issues when it comes to training of people and the acquisition of equipment and devices necessary for surveillance and investigation. (IDI/male/28 years/Yoruba)

In the opinion of another interviewee:

> I believe one of the unrated challenges is our bad judicial system that usually frees these culprits when political figures interfere in a case.

> Another one is the inadequate devices and equipment that can be used to carry out serious and effective investigation. (IDI/male/31 years/Edo)

A respondent also claimed:

> Most times, there is this uncooperative attitude of some of our financial houses (inadequate synergy with financial institutions). Also, funds are not available to support and/or train police officers. Investigation process equally requires the use of certain equipment and these are not usually readily available. (IDI/male/45 years/ Hausa)

Another insight was given by one of the key-informants:

> Another challenge is that at times when officers conducted their investigations and get fruitful result, some superior authorities and political figures do get involved and interrupt the process of charging suspect(s) to court. Thereby, rendering the whole investigation and interrogation ineffective. The Lagos Police Command is doing it best despite the lack of essential machineries and equipment. I am proud to say police officers are using their brains and intellect to detect crime and make arrest. When police officers do their best on cases and then such cases are being cancelled because of the network of culprits to some highly influential people in society or even in the police, this act drains our motivation to combat crime generally. (KII/male/55 years/Edo)

The above assertions of the respondents show the cybercrime policing efforts of the Lagos State Police Command are being hampered by multiple institutional and non-institutional challenges such as the lack of relevant equipment for effective crime investigation, the lack of a database of cybercriminals, an inefficient judicial system, political interference in police investigations, the uncooperative attitude of some financial houses, and the low reportage of cybercrime incidents by victims.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Regarding the types of cybercrime that are commonly reported to the Lagos State Police Command, the study established that ATM/debit card fraud, cyber bullying, cyber harassment, hacking, identity theft, online impersonation, and online money transfer fraud were the types of cybercrime that were commonly handled by the Police Command. A major deduction that can be made from this finding is that there is a high demand and expectations on police officers in Lagos regarding cybercrime as both financially and non-financially motivated cases of cybercrime are increasingly being brought to their attention by victims. This finding is supported by

Harkin et al. (2018) who found that the pervasiveness of cyber-enabled or cyber-facilitated crimes means that police officers must be ready to confront its growing relevance and the increasing public demands to respond to cyber offending.

The response of the Lagos State Police Command to cybercrime indicated that such cases were being handled by different police detachments, such as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, the Special Task Force Unit, and the Special Fraud Unit. A major implication of this finding is that the approach of the Police Command to handling cybercrime is not wholly different from its response to offline crimes, as these police units were originally set up to fight traditional crimes such as armed robbery, fraud cases, and kidnapping. This finding corroborates the position of Whelan and Harkin (2019) that the extent to which police organisations have adequately understood and prioritised cybercrimes and their level of expertise in dealing with cyber offences have been generating serious debates.

It was also established in the study that though police personnel of the Lagos State Command were being exposed to professional training in cybercrime policing, the opportunity to enhance vocational skills was limited to some categories of police officials. The restriction of training programs on cybercrime policing to certain categories of officers may be due to the perennial paucity of funds facing the Nigeria Police Force (Ojedokun, 2021; Adebayo & Ojo, 2009. This result supports the observation of Dupont (2017) that despite the increasing recognition of the social and economic costs of cybercrime, the main beneficiaries of the increased public-sector funding to promote cyber security have been security and intelligence agencies rather than local police organisations.

Furthermore, findings on the operational strategies of the Lagos State Police Command showed that this law enforcement department recognised the intensity, scope, and devastating consequences of cybercrime and the threat that activities of cybercriminals pose to legitimate users of cyber space. Thus, it has put in place multiple strategies to combat the crime while also collaborating with other relevant stakeholders in cybercrime policing. This finding is in line with Willits and Nowacki (2016) that many police agencies are developing new strategies to combat the devastating impacts of cybercrime. Also, the fact that the Lagos State Police Command in its effort at policing cybercrime is being confronted by different institutional and non-institutional challenges may negatively affect the overall job performance and service-delivery capacity of its police personnel as it concerns the fighting of cybercrime and the detection, investigation, and prosecution of cybercriminals. Indeed, studies conducted elsewhere have linked the ineffectiveness of police agencies at fighting cybercrime to factors such as their inability to acquire necessary technologies that are essential for conducting adequate police investigations, insufficient training, and the difficulty of retaining officers who possess the appropriate skills to combat cybercrime (Holt & Lee, 2019; Koziarski & Lee, 2020; Bossler & Holt, 2012).

CONCLUSION

This study was primarily interested in understanding cybercrime policing in the Lagos State Police Command of the Nigeria Police Force. It was established that the major types of cybercrimes being handled by officials of the Command were ATM/debit card fraud, bullying, hacking, identity theft, online impersonation, and fraudulent online money transfers. The approach of the Police Command to handling cybercrime is not wholly different from its response to offline crimes. Professional training programs on cybercrime policing are restricted to certain categories of police officers. The Lagos State Police Command had developed multiple strategies for combating cybercrime. However, its cybercrime policing effort is still being hampered by various challenges.

Therefore, to effectively tackle cybercrime, it is imperative for the Lagos State Police Command to set-up a specialised unit that will be responsible for investigating and prosecuting cybercrime cases. This step is necessary because the current practice of the Command, which essentially involves assigning cybercrime cases to police units focusing on real space crimes, is unsustainable and less result oriented. The evolving nature of cybercrime and transnational mode of operations of cybercriminals require the services of specially trained and highly skilled police officials in cybercrime policing. Similarly, the Federal Government of Nigeria should make adequate funds available to the Nigeria Police Force to enable it to procure essential equipment and technologies such as relevant software applications and digital forensic tools that are needed by its State Commands for cybercrime policing, investigations of cybercriminal cases, and the collection of electronic evidence. Also, the police organisation should be financially empowered to enable it to periodically sponsor or organise professional training programs on cybercrime policing for its personnel to improve their overall service delivery capacity. Equally, it is important for the Lagos State Police Command to innovate some institutional frameworks through which it can better collaborate with relevant stakeholders such as victims of cybercrime, judicial officials, and staff of financial institutions in the investigation and prosecution of cybercriminals. Finally, the Nigeria Police Force should adequately protect and provide necessary support for its personnel who are handling cases of cybercrime to encourage them to remain resolute and unwavering in the face of likely intimidation that may be directed at them by powerful individuals wishing to interfere in their investigations.

About the authors:

Usman A. Ojedokun, PhD *is a lecturer at the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He majors in the area of Criminology and Victimology. His core research areas of focus include: crime prevention and law enforcement, policing and police studies, violence, gender and cultural studies. He has worked and published extensively in these areas. His recently co-edited book, Criminal Justice System in Nigeria, funded by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) was published in June, 2022. Twitter handle: @kunleojedokun.*

Samson I. Oshilaja *is a postgraduate student at the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.*

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"The house always wins" — Empirical reflections on UK Freedom of Information legislation for policing research

Mehzeb Chowdhury

ABSTRACT

Freedom of information legislation (FOIL) as a method for criminal justice research is relatively underexamined, notwithstanding its marketisation as an academic resource. This paper investigates the seldom-used technique in the context of policing research conducted with forty-five (45) forces in the United Kingdom. An examination of the instant study, previous research using the method, the challenges the researcher faced, and the overall merits of using FOIL, are supplemented by consideration of the general efficacy of the provisions in the jurisdiction. Despite improvements to accessibility, the principal issues plaguing the method continue to be non-responses, late responses, misunderstood requests leading to relaying of unwanted data, unlabelled and unsorted records, raw data without contextual information to make sense of it, and out-of-date information. Recommendations are afforded and contextualised to inform potential users of the nuances of FOIL, in what can be described as a work-in-progress rather than a reliable data collection mechanism.

Keywords: *Police Data Management, Criminal Justice, Research Methods, Freedom of Information, Policing Research*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a trend to allocate dedicated resources for records and information management at public sector institutions in the United Kingdom (Bertot et al., 2014). This has been evidenced by the re-evaluation of information systems at these organisations since the enactment of UK Freedom of Information legislation (UKFOIL). The UKFOIL system covers a wide range of criminal justice agencies, including the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice; the Crown Prosecution Service; all forty-three (43) police forces (England and Wales); respective forces in Scotland and Northern Ireland; state-run prisons; and the probation service (United Kingdom, 2000).

It is unclear to what extent academic researchers are making use of UKFOIL as a resource for data collection. The Ministry of Justice, which collates the data on Freedom of Information (FOIL) usage, does not categorise the requests and responses by information seeker. Apart from historians, researchers have traditionally made limited use of FOIL (Lee, 2001), although its use has increased in recent years (Clifton-Sprigg et al., 2020).

FOIL has proved useful for uncovering government waste, corruption, and public health matters (Halstuk & Chamberlin, 2006; Fink, 2018). It has been used for requests in research (Griffiths, 2010; Murray, 2012) spanning multiple fields (Lee, 2001; Walby & Larsen, 2012). And, while some works have investigated the value of FOIL as a research method (Lee, 2005), concerned academics have mainly concentrated on prospective negatives of FOIL use (Breathnach et al., 2011; Wilson, 2011).

However, FOIL's potential as a robust research utility on both a theoretical and practical level cannot be understated. Such requests can allow researchers to access previously unattainable data that can then be subjected to analysis (Vaughan, 1996, 2004, 2006). Theoretically, data obtained through FOIL symbolises a powerful instrument for democratising the research process. These documents can afford a distinctive take on reality, shedding light on otherwise unknown facets of state functions (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004).

Social scientists in the US have used FOIL in the following areas: (1) the involvement of academics with intelligence-gathering activities (Diamond, 1992); (2) the surveillance of social scientists by US security agencies (Keen, 1999); and, (3) government efforts to institute economic, cultural, and political supremacy over foreign countries (Calavita, 1992; Coleman & Seligman, 1988).

In the UK, FOIL usage has led to revelatory studies involving police staff mental health (Cartwright & Roach, 2021), terrorism-prevention measures (Atkinson et al., 2019), PFI decision-making processes of local authorities (Khadaroo, 2008); Ministry of Defence medical data (Seal, 2006), Department of Health documents on drug addiction policies (Mold & Berridge, 2007), and police crime data (Johnson & Hampson, 2015; Hutchings et al., 2006).

The increasing use of FOIL can be attributable to a multitude of emerging challenges concerning police governance and accountability that have recently escalated the priorities of policymakers and stakeholders worldwide (Walsh & Conway, 2011). Blair (1996) outlined the wider intent behind UKFOIL, touching on aspects such as the need for bringing UK politics up to date, keeping it in line with the aspirations of the British public, and delivering a more open, effective, and efficient government. Compliance with UKFOIL is, therefore, a matter of practical relevance, as opposed to merely an ideological one.

Notwithstanding the fictitious depictions that imagine the police function as round-the-clock patrols, gunfights, highspeed highway chases, and cases solved by talented, eccentric loners, policing at its core remains an information handling profession (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997), with the organisation subject to UKFOIL (United Kingdom, 2000). The efficient management and usage of information have been crucial functions in crime prevention, reduction, and investigation, while the volume of data that is accumulated, stored, and disseminated as part of police work has remained significant (Luen & Al-Hawamdeh, 2001). In the past, working practices and the data generated from police activities were kept from public inspection. However, since 2005, forces in the UK have functioned with a new-found openness, where state bodies and the public demand for transparency, performance measurement and data disclosure are realised (Cooke & Sturges, 2009).

The rise of law enforcement agencies as efficient handlers of information that are more receptive to outside scrutiny can best be described as a work-in-progress. Gottschalk and Solli-Saether (2007, p. 47) suggested that occupational culture was “shaped by the socially relevant worlds of the occupation”. In organisations such as police forces, individuals are repeatedly exposed to public confrontation and risk, their decisions questioned, and frequently good deeds ignored (Burke et al., 2007). The result is an organisational culture that centres on concealment, self-preservation, violence/aggression, and the closing of ranks when under threat (Chibnall, 1979; Christensen & Crank, 2001).

Mawby (2002a, 2002b) found that the previously established culture of “tell them only what you must” had gradually shifted to “withhold what you must”, thus promoting accessibility between the Metropolitan Police and the public. This strategy of boosting transparency can be traced to the supposition that the media could be useful in crime fighting efforts, community engagement, and improving confidence in the police, while maintaining morale within organisational ranks (Ericson et al., 1989).

As a consequence of the enactment of UKFOIL, Readhead (2007) stated that police forces in England and Wales fielded more than 20,000 annual information requests, and that the volume of the same rose by around 50% between 2005 and 2007. Ten years later (between 2015 and 2016), the number doubled, with 45,415 FOI requests received across all monitored bodies with a timely response rate of 91% (Cabinet Office, 2016). The Department for Work and Pensions, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice, and Home Office made up the four largest Departments of State in terms of the number of FOI requests for the third year in a row, demonstrating the significance of FOIL in state-run security organisations. Combined, they made up over half (53%) of FOI requests to Departments of State.

Legislation not specifically directed at police forces also contributed to their new-found openness. The Human Rights Act 1998 (United Kingdom, 1998a), the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (United Kingdom, 1998b), and most significantly the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (United Kingdom, 2000) all played a key role. Relevant policy schemes included the "Modernising Government" agenda of the Labour government, which concentrated on public sector reorganisation and improving state accountability (Parliament, 1999). It led to an agenda of police reform (Home Office, 2004), which attempted to establish "a more responsive police service with neighbourhood policing at its heart" and better police accountability.

Democratic societies' need for accessible, responsive, and accountable law enforcement agencies is accentuated by a pronounced effort to demonstrate these qualities to the public. In the UK, an amalgamation of factors, including FOIL, has steadily strengthened a movement towards an ostentatious philosophy of openness and professionalised communication (Readhead, 2004). However, unrestricted transparency is far from reality. Police organisations, because of their intrinsic relationship to local politics and the media, and continuing questioning and litigation by members of the public, feel a compulsion to robustly defend themselves; frequently overstating their role and effectiveness in crime fighting, while railing against scrutiny (Rosenbaum, 2010). As a result, FOIL as a data collection method for sociological, criminological, and policing research requires scrutiny to test its viability and reliability in real-world applications in the research sphere.

This paper examines UKFOIL, specifically queries relating to officially held human resource and financial spending data within law enforcement organisations. FOIL as a research method is formulated with the awareness and understanding that complementary to its appropriateness to this subject matter, its operational integrity requires rigorous scrutiny. Opportunities to examine the dynamics of FOIL for social research, therefore, present more than an elementary insight into the operation of government. The value of such enquiries rests in the contribution to literature on the subject, particularly on the real-world triumphs and failures of the method. The paper elucidates on FOIL's methodological potential in data gathering, past successes and challenges faced by its users by contextualising this information with the author's findings. Through the evaluation of FOIL provisions in the jurisdiction for policing research, the paper informs stakeholders and prospective users of the challenges of the method and practicalities to consider before investing in it.

PRE-REQUEST CONSIDERATIONS

The UKFOIL provisions should be of particular interest to the criminological researcher whose intended subjects/organisations are often data-rich, but who are reluctant to publicise the same. Data gathered using FOIL retains vast information access potential and social value despite its relatively limited use in academic research (Lee, 2001; Relyea, 1987). The provisions can facilitate access to data that may not have been previously retrievable, at least without drawn-out negotiations with public bodies. However, regardless of FOIL (including UKFOIL) procedures becoming an increasingly opportune option for research, some often overlooked factors should be considered to assess the viability of the research method.

Ethics and confidentiality

Access to publicly held data brings ethical and legal questions of confidentiality and security. Often the requested information concerns sensitive data about protected groups, and therefore restricting access in safe settings may be required. The Administrative Data Taskforce (ADT) report recommended using safe or secure data settings (UKADRN, 2012) when handling criminal justice data. The HM Revenue and Custom (HMRC) data lab affords access to tax records under controlled conditions. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) data lab facilitates organisations working with offenders to have their data linked to the MoJ re-offending records. Elliot et al. (2013), in their research concerning new sources of data collection in the social sciences, found that only 26% of their survey respondents had used virtual safe settings to access and analyse state-produced data. Researcher cognisance of facilities offering safe settings such as the Secure Data Service, the HMRC's data lab and the Ministry of Justice data lab, is key if gatekeepers are reluctant to release information under FOIL for confidentiality and security but agree to grant access in a more controlled setting. Such awareness is important because FOI provisions tend to blur the lines between established understandings of primary and secondary research and by extension, ethical issues (Walby & Luscombe, 2018).

Awareness and training

A lack of understanding of the types of information obtainable through FOIL, and the procedure to be followed are additional barriers to using the method. There can be a perception that relying on FOIL would jeopardise the researcher's relationship with the information-carrying bodies, risking future research access. There is also cynicism that institutions actively seek loopholes in the provisions where they do not want the information released (Yeager, 2006; Brown, 2009).

The issues that prominently feature can be addressed relatively auspiciously. The matter of a lack of awareness can be elucidated through raising education and guidance. Universities can offer training from a compliance perspective on how its administrative staff answer FOI requests, as well as providing coaching on how academics can effectively use the method to gather data for their own projects.

Gatekeepers and the walled garden

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The introduction of FOIL, though virtuous, has not eradicated the long-established cultures of secrecy in government and other public authorities. Research in other jurisdictions has demonstrated that there are often attempts to circumvent the new rights and attenuate them (Roberts, 2005). It featured in the development of FOIL in Canada, where measures designed to ensure that central government could effectively "handle" sensitive FOI requests, were put in place to reduce the damage to the state's reputation (p. 2). Public institutions may arbitrarily rely on exemptions in the FOIL to refuse access, despite systems of internal reviews and appeals, which have the potential to protect against such refusals.

Information overload and data management strategies

Examining organisational culture to gauge the extent and scope of available information and its accessibility for research, has sociological value (Wallace et al., 1999). These enquires often take the form of documentary analysis, where police forces provide raw data (such as numbers, facts, and figures), or content-based documents containing literature, descriptions, or conclusions.

Official documents and records may be a rich source of data for social research (Braithwaite, 1981). However, in many cases, the content of requests may relate to unpublished material, requiring retrieval through FOIL. Using internal documents may reduce reflexivity in research (Bryman, 2004), but may lead to sorting and interpretation problems, as any gathered data is often not drafted or arranged in a manner that fits the requester's needs.

Often lengthy procedures pertaining to making sense of the unsorted and uncoded data are incidental when dealing with unpublished information (Lee, 2001). FOIL provisions do, however, allow researchers to shape requests for the information specifically sought (Savage & Hyde, 2014). This characteristic of FOIL makes any information gained through it more like primary material, as the information is retrieved through planned and directed queries. Leaks of often confidential public records, most prominently by such groups as Wikileaks, have raised questions and created discourse about governance and accountability. Claims by Wikileaks that the released data is original source material also raises questions about the nature and dynamics of official, documentary data (Curran & Gibson, 2013; Riedel, 2000). Such inquiries contextualise FOI requests and the data obtained through the exercise of the methodology in terms that social science researchers can understand and evaluate for their purposes. FOIL requests can also yield a large volume of data, especially if identical requests are sent to multiple public authorities (Morris et al., 1981). Therefore, formulating fit-for-purpose data management strategies is crucial in the research design.

REQUESTS

Considering the above factors, FOIL applications were drafted, putting into place contingencies for any unforeseen results. The object of the requests was to gather information on the state of crime scene investigations and its practitioners in the UK.

Published records from official sources such as the Home Office (2015-20a) proved unhelpful in determining the number of crime scene investigators in the jurisdiction, or Home Office (2015-20b) for the finances specific to forensic science and crime scene investigations/investigators. The definitions in academic and practitioner literature on the nature and scope of crime scene work also did not assist in ascertaining the exact premise of the occupation (Ludwig et al., 2012).

UKFOIL was thus used to request crime scene practitioner job postings and/or advertisements from Human Resource (HR) departments of police forces in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Financial information for crime scene work, laboratory forensic science and overall scientific support spending was also sought, along with staff numbers. All forces afford guidance about freedom of information and specifics on publication schemes, on force-specific websites, although the robustness and user-friendliness vary considerably. Definitions and elaborations of the terms used in the request were included to avoid misinterpretation. A total of forty-five (45) requests were made electronically, using the emails or website forms set out for UKFOIL purposes.

RESULTS

Out of the forty-five (45) requests, thirty-five (35) provided at least one (1) advert/role profile. These profiles varied in detail but afforded scope to canvass the types of crime scene jobs the forces employed. The financial and staff data sought had more mixed responses.

There was usually a common disclaimer attached to replies from English forces that had refused at least some part of the request for information:

> Due to the different methods of recording information across 43 forces, a specific response from one constabulary should not be seen as an indication of what information could be supplied (within cost) by another. Systems used for recording these figures are not generic, nor are the procedures used locally in capturing the data. For this reason, responses between forces may differ, and should not be used for comparative purposes.

No response

Two English police forces (based in the North-West and South-West) did not respond to the FOI requests, and as such, were under statutory breach of their duties under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Full refusals

The refusals used the exemption under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Full refusals were from a further two forces in England. There was no such conduct from Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland, although limited data was provided from some forces.

A South-West England force refused because, despite them holding the relevant information, "the cost of compliance would exceed the cost limits under the Act which is currently set at £450 or 18 staff hours work". They further clarified that as financial data was not "centrally recorded and would involve an extensive search of [their] records to find and collate…it would take considerably longer than 18 hours to retrieve the information". The first two categories of records sought (job postings and staff numbers) were separate from the financial data requests but were not addressed at all in the refusal letter, and no information was provided.

The other, a North-East England force, sent a refusal based on similar grounds, adding that "numerous files would require retrieving and reading manually to ascertain if they are pertinent to [the] request and is estimated that this would take in excess of the appropriate time stipulated".

Partial information

There were also twenty-four (24) forces in England that provided partial financial and/or staff data, as well as Scotland (where the approached organisation was only developed in 2013) and Northern Ireland, while one force in South Wales did the same. The partial data was related to the requested information. The reasoning behind the refusals can be summarised under the following broad headers:

Difficulty in retrieval of information

An East England police force declared that "the numerical data [presented in this response] is an un-audited snapshot of un-published data sourced from "live" systems and is subject to the interpretation of the original request by the individual extracting the data." A London force refused by stating that it was "unable to supply the requested information… because the functions… are not conducted by one individual department, and it is not possible to isolate the costs according to the categories… requested." One South-West England force stated that "unfortunately the Constabulary is unable to split these costs between the items specified…"

A West-Midlands force responded with the disclaimer that "this information [was] not held in a readily retrievable format". No statutory provision was cited or availed for the refusal of the other information sought. It was explained that "this information is not held…centrally or in an electronically searchable format as it covers different areas of work within different departments”.

A large regional force was also unable to provide the breakdown, stating that it was “unable to collate this data as it is not coded separately within [our] accounts”. One London police force provided a delayed response and subsequently sought an extension to the time allocated for response. The force provided “full disclosure” as per their own wording but were unable to provide the requested financial data.

Mislabelled or unsorted data

Unlabelled figures were sent as a response by a Midlands (England) police force with no explanation or legend on how to decipher the information. Labelling issues were also used as a reason for partial information release by a force from the same region. Another force from the area provided partial data, explaining that its “accounts [were] not split down into the categories asked for” and it was “not able to break it down any further”.

Partial data for the financial spending request was provided by an East-Midlands (England) force, stating that it did not “have a specific costing code for laboratory work. In this instance costings are not coded individually on invoices by type of work but are under one costing code for the CSI Department”. There was also no data afforded for the request for financial spending specific to scientific support.

REFLECTIONS

Lack of uniformity in data management practices

Citing “a level of file disorganization matched only in some people’s attics,” Calavita (1992, p. 14) found that US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) records were “catalogued according to a variety of overlapping and unwieldy systems”. A similar conclusion can be reached about data management systems within police forces in the UK, and they should be at the forefront of researcher consideration when evaluating the use of FOIL.

There was no uniformity in the wording, the ambit of duties, rank and labelling of crime scene staff roles and responsibilities. None of the staff designation labels corresponded to staff numbers information or where, if anywhere, forensic science and crime scene investigation personnel were being included. This made it impossible to correlate between publicly available police staffing data released by the Home Office (2015-20a), and any forensic science/crime scene personnel data retrieved through FOIL requests. Some forces sent numbers that were headcount figures, while others gave full-time equivalent numbers. Headcount figures, therefore, needed to be separated from FTE. Four English forces did not participate, and one provided partial information. The responses indicated a widespread and jurisdiction-wide discrepancy in how officially released staffing data was systemised. Personnel numbers were difficult to collate, as they were provided in various formats.

A telling note in bold letters on an FOI response from a Midlands force was far more revelatory than perhaps could have been imagined by the senders:

> Please note that Police Forces in the United Kingdom are routinely required to provide crime statistics to government bodies and the recording criteria is set nationally. However, the systems used for recording these figures are not generic, nor are the procedures used locally in capturing the crime data.

Operating in bad faith

Bureaucracy has several self-preserving characteristics, none of which is more important than protecting its public image (Lee et al., 2011). Inherently, bureaucrats are thus drawn to protect individual career opportunities and their future prospects. It can thus be understood why difficulties arise in carrying out independent research on questions that are controversial to state entities.

The total disregard for statutory obligations under FOIL and subsequent non-responses from the two English police departments (discussed earlier) are shoehorns for this category. Bad faith practices were also evident in a West-Midlands (England) force's reply, which contained three digital files, including the official response letter. All provided files were corrupted and could not be read on any operating system (Windows, Linux, or MacOS). A follow-up email was sent for copies of these files, but there was no reply. As the response letter was unavailable, no impressions, reasoning or explanatory information could be retrieved for presentation or analysis.

Arbitrary refusal

One North-East (England) force failed to disclose any financial information, offering a "No information held" response. It was stated that the force did not hold any information on the figures spent on crime scene work, laboratory expenses, or the total costs incurred on scientific support during the six-year period sought.

Cost calculations

Several English forces cited cost considerations as a basis for refusing requests under the provisions afforded to them by S.12 of UKFOIL. These were a major barrier to accessing FOIL provisions by Kingston et al. (2018) conducting research in the same jurisdiction, demonstrating an ongoing problem and possible misuse of the statute by the data-holding organisations.

Unwanted data

From the social science perspective, using FOIL to collect data has shared limitations to unobtrusive measures (Webb et al., 1966, 1981). These depend on what exists for the identification, collection, and retrieval (Lee, 2000) or how such data can be produced (Webb et al., 1981; Lee, 2001). However, these depend on individual data hubs cooperating with information requests.

Organisations also relay vast amounts of uncollated information that are only peripherally relevant to the FOI request. One South-East England force demonstrated the practice by providing an abundance of unlabelled financial data that was not requested and stating that it could not "satisfactorily split out the budget further…".

A Northern (England) force refused to disclose financial information by stating that "as section 21 [of Freedom of Information Act 2000] is an absolute exemption there is no requirement for [the force] to conduct a public interest test". The note was accompanied by a link to a Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) (previously HMIC) report, but this was already publicly available and did not assist in the inquiry — and was not sought or requested.

Out-of-date information

Several forces provided role profiles with mentions of defunct organisations, such as the Forensic Science Service (FSS) and Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners (CRFP). This showed that role profiles had not been updated in quite some time, even though the requests for information was filed years after the organisations were shut down. This demonstrated a requirement for updating old profiles (Scenes of Crime Officer, and Crime Scene Investigator), and was also indicative of the record-keeping issues at some English forces. The role profiles had date stamps from various periods dating back to the late 2000s. Many had not been updated in years, and some forces could not provide data altogether. One reason given for noncompliance was that no staff had been hired by the refusing organisation during the period covering the FOI requests; the implication being that updating records was a more reactive than proactive exercise for some forces.

Delay and deadlines

Most researchers experienced in using FOIL are convinced that it is ill-advised to rely on using its provisions to acquire data if one is working on tight deadlines or the project for which the data is being collected was conceived on the expectation that fit-for-the-purpose, fully usable material would be available on request (Keen, 1992; Noakes, 1995; Price, 1997). There are examples of researchers waiting up to eight months to receive FBI records relating to the American Sociological Association (Keen, 1992), and others between 1977 and 1991, exchanging more than 1,700 letters with the FBI in relation to FOIL requests (Diamond, 1992). These issues often cause researchers to seek recourse to other sources (Noakes, 1995).

The issue was prevalent in this study too, when a London-based police force requested two separate extensions, taking over three months to respond to the request. During this time, there was no deadline or timetable, leaving the research process stagnant and prospects of receiving a reply uncertain. It is worth noting that this was the same force that had provided “full disclosure” without addressing an entire section of the request.

Problematic FOI request processing can, however, be contextualised and even excused due to ongoing organisational issues, such as understaffing, underfunding, and bureaucratic disorganisation. Commentators note that changes in personnel or administrative structure within agencies can also significantly affect FOIL compliance (Aid, 1998; Theoharis, 1998) and should therefore be an important matter of consideration for researchers using the method.

DISCUSSION

The results and reflections on the experience of using FOIL can seem dissuading to prospective researchers. However, for any meaningful significance and implications of the findings of this paper to be gauged, the same should be contextualised in light of the underlying rationale and intended functions of UKFOIL, and the barriers it faces to live up to its potential.

Data administration practices and their real-world impacts on information freedom have, over the years, gradually gained importance; from a position of perceived democratic virtue to a business objective for public bodies (Pozen, 2016). In a climate where police performance is increasingly measured through metrics such as legitimacy, trust, and public confidence, the need for information compliance from a public relations standpoint has never been greater (Chowdhury, 2022). This is a recurring theme in advanced democracies where the increasing focus on image, maintenance of trust, confidence, and legitimacy to the public have become paramount for state security agencies (Giddens, 1990; Cain et al., 2003; Evetts, 2003; 2006).

This need has been further accentuated by bodies such as the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, along with non-state actors like the Open Society Institute maintaining calls for robust

Freedom of Information legislation (FOIL) around the world and assigning value to its introduction into an increasingly growing selection of jurisdictions (Ackerman & Sandoval-Ballesteros, 2006).

Consequently, the importance of investigation into the administration of FOIL, and evaluating its provisions and effectiveness has gained traction in adopting jurisdictions (Islam, 2003; OECD, 2005). However, the danger lies in the possibility that the operationalisation of such provisions is for the mere purpose of quelling international pressure, rendering them ineffectual and free from any purposeful impact (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2006; Relly & Sabharwal, 2009).

The findings of this paper provide a picture of the real-world gaps between policy and practice with regard to FOIL. The UKFOIL provisions for data collection made the most sense, due to the impracticalities of more traditional methods of qualitative data collection, principally surrounding the number of police forces and the volume of content being sought for the study. As the research questions were tied in with the methods, the substance of the FOI request was outlined with clarity and simplicity.

All 45 police forces were contacted via email, with replies varying in their timeframes and levels of detail. The major problems faced were non-response, late response, misunderstood request and as a result being sent wrong data, unlabelled data, raw data without contextual information to make sense of it, and out-of-date information.

Problems such as the inability to identify relevant material from unsorted data, being prescribed to pay substantial amounts in processing fees, and receiving large volumes of material containing a high level of garbage data were common issues throughout the jurisdiction. Findings by Burgess (2003) closely coincided with the refusal or stonewalling tactics experienced by the author of this paper, most prominently: (1) specification of data for administrative purposes, internal to the functioning of the organisation and, therefore, not applicable under FOIL; (2) concealment of information that is potentially available, but not readily at hand; (3) limited access to data, making it incomplete or misleading; (4) controlled access to data, rendering it distorted and giving the picture desired to be shown; and, (5) lengthy bureaucratic delays to dissuade the seeker.

The outcomes of the FOI requests and reasons provided for refusals, or returning incomplete data, provided a damning picture of data management practices in UK police forces. The organisations were severely lacking in terms of administrative efficiency due to non-standardised data retention and management procedures. There were also major differences in how police organisations stored, labelled, and presented data with relation to the same, or similar expense, and even how crime scene staff figures, crime scene, laboratory and overall scientific costs were perceived and recorded. Forces were either completely skirting their responsibilities under FOIL or responding but failing to retrieve the data due to purported technological or management frailties. They also routinely provided incomplete data citing changes to computer systems, moving to a new style of data recording, and claiming not to hold breakdowns of spending or expenses beyond a general, estimated broad budget.

These failings are unsurprising, considering the ideological conflict between traditional policing traits such as the culture of tribalism and secrecy (Cockcroft, 2012), and the maxims of openness and transparency that freedom of information legislation demands (Kirtley, 2006). Researcher awareness is key in this regard, as organisational culture within law enforcement has traditionally favoured pushback against attempts by purported outsiders to gain information about the inner workings of the establishment (Delattre, 1989) as well as a propensity to shield colleagues from potential scrutiny (Chatterton, 1979).

This lack of transparency is compounded by the Home Office (2013) itself not possessing police force policy latency data. The National Audit Office (2014, p. 6) only has partial access to performance data, service quality and management information, quality management and accreditation, and the physical security of evidence in the forensic service sector. Neither body can compel any provider, including police forces, to provide data and forces are not obliged to provide information (p. 7). The data that does get collected relates to general police force expenditure (specifics are not often recorded as evidenced by this paper), market information through the Forensic Management Information Tool (FMIT), and supplier monitoring data such as turnaround times (p. 5).

Uniform data collection, cataloguing, storage, and networking would therefore have to be at the forefront of policy change if FOIL is to be a robust sociological method for UK policing research. A cultural shift must also be invoked to align the marketing rhetoric of openness and cooperation with actual performance of FOIL obligations by police forces. Discrepancies between the level of performance can be understandable because of imbalances in resource allocation to different forces. However, miraged openness to quell international pressure or maintain brand image (Chowdhury, 2022) indicate that the legitimacy of UKFOIL must be earned through meaningful provisions of data democratisation within police forces, rather than the current self-preserving mechanisms of smoke and mirrors.

The UK's relatively late arrival to the freedom of information process [the first provisions date back to 1766 in Sweden (Ackerman & Sandoval-Ballesteros, 2006)] may also be preventing it from reaching its full potential and as a result keeping researchers from effectively using the method. There are encouraging signs, certainly in terms of the appointment of dedicated staff at police forces to handle FOI requests and the legislation compelling forces to provide reasons for refusal. It can therefore be anticipated that with time the UKFOIL mechanisms will self-correct their inherent frailties. However, until then, with the examples (in this paper, and others) of UK police forces completely ignoring the legal provisions and not being held accountable for breaching statutory obligations, researchers should also be ready for lengthy periods of uncertainty and oftentimes disappointment.

CONCLUSION

Freedom of information legislation retains the capacity to facilitate greater transparency in government operations, with scope for increased accountability for state actors. However, various organisational and policy frailties threaten its significance and impact. These relate to technical and legal characteristics of FOIL, as well as bureaucratic shortcomings such as implementation and enforcement. The legislation operates on the assumption that organisations will adhere to its provisions adopting a policy of openness in data sharing and management. This paper found that these principles are inherently incompatible with law enforcement, particularly concerning the wording of FOIL request refusals and the practices espoused by forces to attain the minimum threshold of compliance. Rife with arbitrary refusals, partial data, unformatted and unlabelled information, outdated records and in some cases outright non-responses, this study elucidates the fundamental problems that FOIL faces as a research method. While the process has been simplified somewhat by adopting submission mechanisms via the internet, the inkblot style of presentation leaves the collected data interpretative rather than declarative. Data management practices in such organisations require uniform practices for record retention, storage, and dissemination for the progression of FOIL as a worthwhile system of data democratisation. It would thus be appropriate to class FOIL as a developing method suitable for research in the policing sphere but this must be qualified by a disclaimer that despite the clarity, scope or breadth of the FOI request, the house (in this case, the gatekeeping organisation) with its broad powers of refusal and rebuke, (may) always win.

About the author:

Dr. Mehzeb Chowdhury *is an Assistant Professor at Northumbria University. His research encompasses all areas of criminological imagination, with particular emphasis on science and technology studies, forensic science, policing, and futures studies. He is the innovator of the MABMAT crime scene rover, a NASA-recognised robotic imaging system for forensic scientists.*

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An exploratory study of opioid drug overdoses and how law enforcement officers are affected in their personal and professional lives

Dena Weiss, Daniel Gutierrez, Andrea Gutierrez, and Matthew Loux

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study measures the impact on law enforcement as it relates to police officers responding to opioid drug overdoses. A brief survey was developed to explore how responding to opioid overdoses impacted police officers' personal and professional lives. The results indicate that 59% of the police officers surveyed (n=262) had responded to an opioid overdose while on duty and 46% (n=204) involved a fatal overdose. Data showed that 32.7% (n=139) of the officers indicated they felt uneasy regarding the potentially adverse effects of responding to an opioid overdose and 31.8% (n=135) experienced a heightened awareness of the danger to themselves or other family members. A preliminary examination of the data indicates that opioid overdose calls may be problematic for law enforcement, provoking anxiety and impacting their family lives. The limited study revealed a small percentage of officers experienced hopelessness or feelings that responding to opioid overdose incidents is futile. Post reactions such as anxiety were documented after administering Narcan® to victims of an overdose when children were present. There is a need for further research to gather additional data. At the time of this study, the use of Narcan by law enforcement was rare. Future research is recommended in assessing the anxiety level of officers administering Narcan versus other life-saving activities.

Keywords: *Opioids, overdose, Narcan, police officers*

INTRODUCTION

Police officers have routinely been expected to respond to tragic situations such as homicides, child abuse, sexual assaults, domestic violence, and substance abuse crimes that may be highly stressful. These stress-triggering calls for service may have troubling implications for the individual police officer and law enforcement organization. One area that is gaining attention is the excessive use of opioids and how police organizations are handling the opioid epidemic. With the new expectations for officers to administer life-saving treatments such as Naloxone to drug overdose victims, comes more responsibility usually expected of emergency medical services (EMS).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2022) reported drug overdose deaths increased 29% between April 2020 and April 2021. Overdose deaths in 2021 due to opioid drugs reached 80,816. Remarkably, between 1 March 2020 and 31 August 2020, a study by Faust et al. (2021) found that 21,050 deaths were due to motor vehicle crashes compared to 48,032 drug overdose deaths. Patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain often develop a tolerance for the medication and crave more of the drug than doctors are willing to prescribe. Many who obtained the drug legally turn to the illegal drug market where they are exposed to the instantaneous and euphoric properties of drugs such as heroin. The use of opioids has quickly developed into a crisis due to the tremendous amount of Fentanyl flowing into the United States. The synthetic opioid Fentanyl is being used by the illicit drug market to lace drugs such as cocaine and heroin, causing death due to the potency of this drug in small amounts (Valdez, 2021). According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH), there were 56,516 synthetic opioid drug overdoses (primarily Fentanyl) in 2020, which was six times the number of cases in 2015.

Opioid Overdose Response by Law Enforcement

Fentanyl and Carfentanil are synthetic versions of alkaloids extracted from the seeds of the poppy plant and are manufactured illicitly in China and sold to drug dealers via the internet. Synthetic opioids mimic natural pain relief opiates such as morphine and codeine but are more potent (Salle et al., 2019). Fentanyl is a Schedule II synthetic opioid and is 50-100 times stronger than morphine. Carfentanil, used as an animal tranquilizer, is 10,000 times more powerful than morphine (Clark & Hack, 2019; Leen & Juurlink, 2019). Law enforcement has responded to the opioid abuse crisis by exploring programs to save the lives of those abusing opioids rather than fixating on arrests. The medical community assists law enforcement by training first responders to administer medical aid to overdose victims during the initial contact.

Naloxone Treatment Outcomes

The public health crisis of deadly drug overdoses involving synthetic opioid drugs has resulted in the Federal Drug Administration's (FDA) approval to administer Narcan to reverse the respiratory depression effects of opioids (Lurigio et al., 2018). Narcan is the trade name for Naloxone hydrochloride, a medication used safely since the 1970s as an opioid antagonist. The drug can be administered intravenously, injected into muscle, or sprayed into the victim's nasal cavity (Skolnick, 2018). Initially, Naloxone was only used to resuscitate overdose victims by hospitals and Emergency Medical Services (EMS), but once the FDA approved the Narcan spray in November 2015, the drug became easier to administer. This made it feasible to explore the option for law enforcement to join the fight to prevent opioid drug overdoses.

Before exploring whether law enforcement officers should dispense Narcan, it is important to explore whether Narcan has been proven to save the lives of drug overdose victims. Ray et al. (2018), conducted a study between 2011 and 2016 in Marion County, Indiana known to have the "19th highest mortality rate for overdose deaths in the United States" (p. 2). EMS records and death certificates were obtained from individuals who were administered Naloxone after an overdose and effectively resuscitated. Over 4,700 individual records were reviewed during the study period (Ray et al., 2018). The results showed 78.7% of the study sample were alive at the end of the study period and only "3.3% of patients who had a non-fatal overdose event died of drug-related causes" (Ray et al., 2018, p. 5). Although this is only a small window of time, data confirms that Naloxone is being used successfully to revive opioid drug users after an overdose. Strategic planning that involves the medical community and law enforcement should continue to be explored to reduce overdose deaths.

Role of Law Enforcement in Overdose Reverse Initiative

In the United States, there are ten times more active police officers responding to calls than paramedics (Davis et al., 2015). Law enforcement officers are often the first to have contact with drug overdose victims and therefore, as recommended by the Office of National Drug Control Policy, should be provided with life-saving reversal agents like Narcan. Law enforcement overdose reversal programs are being used nationwide and funding is often provided by the Department of Public Health, federal grants, and forfeiture money (Beletsky, 2014). Studies have shown that the initiative not only saves lives but improves community relations. When an officer responds to an overdose crisis and renders medical assistance to save a drug addict's life, this should quiet any fears others will have of calling and reporting an overdose emergency. The officer may also find that responding to a drug overdose call may offer the opportunity to provide information on drug treatment programs to those involved in the incident. Naloxone rescue programs have been developed in 42 of the United States as of 2018 and the initiatives are proving efficient (Lurigio et al., 2018).

Toll Taken on Law Enforcement

While opioid overdoses have taken thousands of citizens' lives, little research has been conducted that considers the physical and psychological effects that police officers experience when responding to these tragic events. In a recent study, Smiley-McDonald et al. (2022) provided examples of conditions police officers faced while responding to overdose calls as well as the frustration they experience when they repeatedly respond to calls involving the same individuals. The police have responded to opioid overdoses during children's birthday parties and responded to as many as three overdose calls in an eight-hour shift. Officers reported feelings of anxiety described as "nerve wracking" as they waited for victims to respond to Naloxone resuscitation.

In a study by Carroll (2020), it was noted that officers' overdose response efforts often lead to compassion fatigue or professional burnout. These feelings may also be attributed to law enforcement's misperception of the dangers of secondary exposure to Fentanyl (Del Pozo et al., 2021). The United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and various media outlets have reported since 2016 that Fentanyl can be absorbed through the skin or inhaled if particles are airborne. The DEA advised extreme safety precautions were necessary when approaching a possible Fentanyl overdose, including a positive pressure suit with self-contained breathing apparatus (Herman et al., 2020). This alone is enough to cause anxiety and a delay in emergency response efforts and is unwarranted, according to the American College of Medical Toxicology (ACMT) and the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT). The scientific opinion of ACMT and AACT collectively is that the risk of exposure to Fentanyl for a police officer or EMS is minimal when responding to Fentanyl overdose calls. Nitrile gloves and an N95 mask are considered sufficient protective gear (Moss et al., 2017).

Very few incidents of Fentanyl exposure by first responders have been verified. Chiu et al. (2018) described the physical effects of suspected opioid exposure in two health hazard evaluation cases where five police officers were involved in two separate opioid response incidents. All five officers experienced physical symptoms ranging from becoming "sleepy, blurred vision, feeling drunk, and numbness in extremities" (p. 440). One officer eventually slumped to the ground at the scene, was administered Narcan by a fellow officer, and experienced rapid improvement while remaining on the scene (p. 441). While these officers suffered physical effects from exposure, the study does little to inform us of the psychological effects officers may experience. Additional research is needed to expand the literature concerning the physical and psychological impact experienced by law enforcement during and after their involvement in opioid overdose reversal initiatives. Data from the present study was collected from three counties in a southern state and examines the impact that opioid critical response incidents have on police officers.

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METHODOLOGY

A brief survey was designed to capture some of the basic demographic data of police officers, such as 1) age, 2) race, 3) gender, 4) number of years of law enforcement experience, 5) highest education level, and 6) primary shift worked. More importantly, the survey was designed to collect data that would inform us how often police officers in this state located in the southern region responded to drug overdoses, including opioid overdoses and how it impacts both their personal and professional lives. The survey was administered in February 2019 and the survey period ended in May 2019. Questions were yes and no responses and addressed emotional and physiological responses to opioid drug overdose incidents as displayed in question #14:

> ***In the past six months have you experienced any of the following after responding to opioid overdoes calls***.
>
> Thoughts or reoccurring memories of responding to an opioid overdose
>
> Anxiety due to the responsibility of administering Narcan
>
> A lack of ability to control your thoughts concerning opioid overdose
>
> Dreams about opioid overdose that you find disturbing
>
> Thoughts or feelings that responding to opioid overdose calls is futile
>
> Feelings of uneasiness when you are reminded of an opioid overdose
>
> Trouble falling sleep at night
>
> Physical reactions such as an upset stomach, perspiration, dizziness, or any other physical reactions

Once the survey was designed, letters were crafted and sent to police administrators asking permission and encouraging their officers to respond to the survey through a secure SurveyMonkey® webform. A total of 441 police officers responded to the survey from three different police agencies. Although it is not known specifically how many patrol officers are in each agency, the total officer count averaged 350 for two of the agencies and close to 1500 officers for the remaining agency. Data collected was then imported into SPSS for analysis. A Cronbach alpha was performed to determine reliability. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), acceptable Cronbach alpha levels range between .70 to approximately .90. The results from the survey produced a Cronbach alpha of .778,

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which is considered acceptable. Except for several demographic questions in the survey such as those previously mentioned, all variables intended to inform us about officer responses and how they potentially impacted police officers were dichotomous, with a no (coded as 0) or a yes response (coded as 1). Regarding incident response questions, respondents were asked to provide either yes or no answers to sixteen brief questions. In developing the survey, we follow Brewin et al.'s (2002) advice for developing a short questionnaire rather than a lengthy questionnaire that still allows one to potentially measure post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in individuals who have experienced traumatic events and measure their responses to these events to identify these individuals.

Brewin et al. (2002) conducted a study consisting of two samples. The first sample consisted of 41 individuals involved in train accidents. The second sample included 157 victims of violent crimes. Brewin et al. (2002) indicate that ideally instruments intended for screening should be short, simple, and easy to respond to. The less complicated the better, indicating questions should be easily understood by potential respondents. As such, our survey questions with regards to potential effects of overdoses were limited to sixteen questions to ascertain how responding to opioid overdoses may affect police officers. Once collected, descriptive statistics for each of the items were tabulated to develop a better understanding of how officers that respond to opioid overdoses may be affected.

RESULTS

Surveys collected from three police departments resulted in a total of 441 responses. Social demographic data collected indicates that 85.4% (n=375) of the law enforcement officers were males and 14.6% (n=64) were females. With regards to race and ethnicity, 84.5% of the responding officers were White (n=370), 4.34% (n=19) were Black, 8.7% (n=38) were Hispanic, and the remaining 2.5% (n=11) identified themselves as some other racial or ethnic group. In terms of age, 32.1% (n=141) of the officers were aged 40 to 49, followed by 30% (n=132) who were aged 30 to 39. Those 50 and over comprised 26.4% (n=116), with the remaining sample, 11.4% (n=50), consisting of younger officers aged 20 to 29. Like most police agencies, most officers in the sample indicated they worked the first shift, followed by the second shift, with the least amounts of officers assigned to the third shift, as 66% (n=288) reported they worked the first shift, 21.3% (n=93) were assigned to the second shift and the remaining 12.6% (n=55) worked the third shift. All sworn officers within each agency were sent the survey via email.

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Table 1. Demographic Data for Police Officers (n=441)*

		f =	%
Gender	Male	375	85.4%
	Female	64	14.6%
	Total	439	100%
Race/ethnicity	White	370	84.45%
	Black	19	4.34%
	Latino	38	8.7%
	Other	11	2.5%
	Total	438	99.9%
Officer age	20-29	50	11.4%
	30-39	132	30.0%
	40-49	141	32.1%
	50 >	116	26.4%
	Total	439	99.9%
Education level	HS/GED	15	3.4%
	Some college	84	19.1%
	Associate	79	18.0%
	Bachelors	200	45.6%
	Advanced	61	13.9%
	Total	439	100%
Primary shift	First	288	66.0%
	Second	93	21.3%
	Third	55	12.6%
	Total	436	99.9%

*Note: Some figures may not total 100% due to rounding.

Overdoses and Circumstances

Almost 60% (59.5%) (n=262) of the officers in the sample indicated they had been involved in responding to an opioid overdose at least one time within the last six months. The next two questions did not specify a timeframe and the results indicate that of 390 officer responses, 79% (n=308) reported they had responded to at least one non-fatal opioid incident during their career. Pertaining to fatal opioid overdoses, 397 officers responded and 51.4% (n=204) stated they had attended a call involving an opioid overdose death during their career. When asked if their department required administering Narcan to overdose individuals per agency policy, 65% (n=260) reported they were not required by policy to administer Narcan to someone who had overdosed, while 35% (n=140) indicated they were required by policy to administer Narcan to an individual who had overdosed. Only a small number of officers, 7.7% (n=33), indicated they ever self-administered Narcan.®[1] Of the 418 who responded to the question regarding children being present, 37.6% (n=157) indicated that children were present, while 62.4% (n=261) indicated that children were not present when they responded to opioid overdose calls. The higher response rate (418) takes into consideration that some study participants may have responded to both fatal and non-fatal incidents.

How Police Officers were Affected

In this section, we report on how police officers were affected by responding to opioid overdoses. Respondents were asked to identify how responding to opioid overdoses in the past six months had impacted their personal lives. Of the officers who responded (n=425), 86.8% (n=369) indicated that responding to overdose calls did not affect their family life, while 13.2% (n=56) responded that they had an impact on their family life. Regarding having thoughts or reoccurring memories of responding to overdose calls, a total of 421 officers responded. Most officers, 84.8% (n=357) indicated they did not experience thoughts or reoccurring memories of responding to overdose incidents, while 15.2% (n=64) responded that they did. When responding to the question of whether they experienced anxiety from administering Narcan,® 89% (n=373) replied that they did not experience feelings of anxiety while 11% (n=46) indicated that anxiety was a factor when administering it.

Very few of the officers indicated they had difficulties controlling their thoughts. Only 2.4% (n=10) of the officers responded yes to this question while a large majority, 97.6% (n=411) indicated they did not have problems in this area. Very few reported they had disturbing dreams regarding responding to critical overdose incidents. Almost 97% (n=407) reported they did not experience disturbing dreams while only 3.1% (n=13) reported having disturbing dreams. Being reminded of

[1] It should be noted that self-administering Narcan is personal administering of Narcan due to exposure.

overdose incidents only impacted 7.1% (n=30) of the officers and 92.9% (n=393) reported being reminded of overdose incidents was not problematic. The same number of officers indicated they did not experience trouble sleeping at night (92.7%, n=393) while 7.3% (31) reported they did have trouble falling asleep at night. Regarding experiencing some type of physical illness or symptom, very few, 2.4% (n=10) reported experiencing some type of physical ailment and the vast majority, 97.6% (n=422) did not experience any physical symptoms related to illnesses. Few reported having trouble controlling feelings of anger – only 3.8% (n=16) reported problems in this area while the majority, 96.2% (n=408) indicated controlling anger was not an issue for them. Likewise, few reported having trouble focusing or concentrating on tasks. Only 4% (n=17) indicated having trouble focusing on a task, while the vast majority, 96% (n=407) did not experience trouble concentrating.[2]

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The data did not reveal a significant percentage of officers negatively impacted by the responsibility of administering Narcan to overdose subjects; however, considering the increase in opioid deaths in the last two years, the incidents officers will be required to respond to will most likely increase. The following were the areas most affected by police officers responding to overdoses. Three of the areas were previously mentioned but it is important to explain the context of the themes that appear to be most problematic. More than 50% (n=204) of the responding officers indicated they had responded to at least one fatal opioid overdose. Additionally, 37.6% (n=157) indicated that children were present when responding to overdose calls. A total of 35% (n=141) of the officers reported they had to administer Narcan to those overdosing. Another 32.7% (n=139) of the officers indicated they felt uneasy regarding the potentially adverse effects of responding to an opioid overdose, and 31.8% (n=135) experienced a heightened awareness of danger to themselves or other family members. Finally, 28.8% (n=122) of the police officers felt that responding to opioid overdoses was futile.

Limitations

Several limitations to the study resulted in a restricted number of law enforcement agencies being sent the survey. Numerous agencies refused to participate due to various reasons, such as concerns by the administration regarding the sensitive nature of the study, and agencies simply claiming they were too busy to be of assistance. Also, more than twenty agencies failed to respond to multiple requests to participate in the study. When this study was conducted, opioid overdose deaths were disturbing; however, since the data was collected, models have been

[2] Only a handful of officers reported worries about adverse effects on K-9 dogs, 4% (n=12) indicated they were worried and 96% (287) were not worried. Most of the officers were not K-9 handlers, so this question had the lowest response rate.

developed that can project future overdose trends. Tse Yang Lim, a researcher from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, predicts overdose deaths in the United States could be 543,000-842,000 between 2020 and 2032 (Lim et al., 2022). The results of a follow-up study may produce additional insights into the well-being of officers as they face further challenges with increased overdose rates and the need to administer Narcan more frequently.

Another limitation of the study was the simple fact that numerous law enforcement agencies within the state chosen for the study do not provide Narcan to their officers to administer during drug overdose calls. According to Illinois Criminal Justice Authority (2019), only about 2,400 police departments across the United States administer Narcan from among the almost 18,000 police agencies in the United States (Reaves as cited in Dempsey et al., 2017, p. 41). Because at the time of this study the use of Narcan by law enforcement was rare, future research is recommended in assessing the anxiety level of officers administering Narcan versus other life-saving activities. These issues limit the study but leave the door open for additional initiatives and law enforcement populations to be examined in a similar manner.

Ethical Assurances

Ethical principles are crucial when asking individuals to volunteer information about their personal and professional life. Ethical reporting of the research data followed the Institutional Review Board guidelines to ensure integrity and the theoretical framework. The researcher did not pressure anyone to participate in the study and did not harm participants mentally during the survey. Informed consent forms were included with each survey giving participants information about the researcher, the time the study would take, and the security of the password protected electronic format of the survey. Simple language was used to explain the study purpose and procedures. There was no risk associated with the study. The participants were notified there would be no compensation and that their identity would be coded for privacy.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the study adds to the body of literature regarding opioid overdoses as it relates specifically to police officers' responses to such critical incidents, more research needs to be done. For example, were the officers that responded when children were present more affected than other incident circumstances because they themselves have children, and were female officers more affected? Do police agencies have policies in place when officers must administer Narcan that help the officers with their mental and physical well-being, as these events can be traumatic? Is the view that responding to these types of incidents is futile related to

Niederhoffer's (1967) theory of cynicism as it relates to time on the force? These issues limit the study but allow for additional initiatives to be explored.

CONCLUSION

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, drug overdose deaths have been on the rise. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2020) indicated that by the end of May 2020, drug overdose deaths in the United States had climbed to over 81,000, which is the highest number ever recorded during a twelve-month period. Clearly, this will put more officers at risk as they are frequently the first to respond to these situations. The CDC (2020) also reported that of the 38 United States jurisdictions that have opioid data available, 37 reported an increase in deaths due to an opioid overdose, 18 experienced increases greater than 50%, and 10 states located in the western region of the United States experienced over a 98% increase in opioid overdose deaths. However, COVID-19 may have exacerbated overdose deaths as some police departments have banned their officers from using Narcan with some ordering their officers to stay six feet away from anyone who overdoses (Feder, 2020).

This study contributes to the academic literature by providing insights into how police officers are affected when responding to opioid overdoses. For example, more than 13% indicated their family life was affected. Almost 29% indicated a sense of hopelessness and that responding to opioid overdoses was futile. Another 31.8% indicated they experienced a heightened awareness of danger, while 32.7% felt uneasily about the adverse effects once they responded. Finally, more than 37% indicated that children were present when they responded. Collectively, these responses provide troubling examples of a workplace stress for law enforcement that statistically will only increase with the influx of Fentanyl into the United States. The adrenaline rush experienced when police officers administer Narcan to an individual in distress is considered a threatening stimulus that may result in the officer feeling overwhelmed. The uneasiness experienced by an officer as they wait to see if Narcan will save the individual from a deadly overdose may cause anticipatory stress as well. El Sayed et al. (2019) state that chronic stressors experienced by law enforcement officers result in work-life imbalance, exhaustion, and burnout on the job.

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About the authors:

Dena Marie Weiss PhD *is a criminal justice and forensics professor with over 25 years of experience in law enforcement. She began her career as a microanalyst and serologist with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and spent numerous years in local law enforcement working as a crime scene investigator and fingerprint analyst. She has provided expert testimony for both the prosecution and defense in the state of Florida as well as the federal court system. Dr. Weiss has been teaching and developing criminal justice curriculum online for 18 years.*

Daniel Gutierrez *recently retired as an assistant professor of criminal justice from Penn State Hazleton. He has authored and co-authored numerous articles on the scholarship of teaching and learning. His research interests include social justice issues as well as homicide investigations.*

Andrea Gutierrez *is a professor in the Bachelor of Social Work program at Touro Worldwide University, Los Alamitos, California. Andrea's interests include trauma and substance abuse disorders, trauma-informed care, and vicarious trauma in the helping professions.*

Matthew Loux PhD *has been in law enforcement for 31 years and has been teaching at American Public University since 2012. Dr. Loux has been a curriculum developer and teacher for 10 years. Dr. Loux has three fraud certifications and has several years' experience in local and federal law enforcement.*

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Demographic Data for police officers

Table 1. Demographic data for police officers (N=441)*			
		=	Percent
Gender	Male	75	85.4%
	Female	4	14.6%
	Total	39	100%
Race/Ethnicity	White	70	84.45%
	Black	9	4.34%
	Latino	8	8.7%
	Other	1	2.5%
	Total	38	99.9%
Officer Age	21-29	0	11.4%
	30-39	32	30.0%
	40-49	41	32.1%
	50 >	16	26.4%
	Total	39	99.9%
Education level	HS/GED	5	3.4%

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	Some college	4	19.1%
	Associate	9	18.0%
	Bachelors	00	45.6%
	Advanced	1	13.9%
	Total	39	100%
Primary Shift	First	88	66.0%
	Second	3	21.3%
	Third	5	12.6%
	Total	36	99.9%

*Note: Some figures may not total 100% due to rounding.

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Table 2: How opioid overdoses affected police officers

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	Yes	No	Total
Affected my family life	56	369	425
	13.2%	86.8%	100%
Thoughts or reoccurring memories	64	357	421
	15.2%	84.8%	100%
Anxiety due to administering Narcan	46	373	419
	11.0%	89.0%	100%
Lack of ability to control thoughts	10	411	421
	2.4%	97.6%	100%
Disturbing dreams	13	407	420
	3.1%	96.9%	100%
Thoughts/feelings responding is futile	122	302	424
	28.8%	71.2%	100%
Uneasiness when reminded of overdoses	30	393	423
	7.1%	92.9%	100%
Trouble falling asleep at night	31	393	424
	7.3%	92.7%	100%
Physical reactions such as upset stomach	10	422	432
	2.4%	97.6%	100%
Difficulty controlling anger	16	408	424
	3.8%	96.2%	100%
Focusing or concentrating on tasks	17	407	424
	4.0%	96.0%	100%
Heightened awareness of danger	135	290	425
	31.8%	68.2%	100%
Uneasiness regarding the adverse effects	139	286	425
	32.7%	67.3%	100%
Are you a K-9 officer?	6	427	433
	1.4%	98.6%	100%
Worried about adverse effects to K-9	12	287	299
	4.0%	96.0%	100%

Figure 1: Response rates & incident circumstances

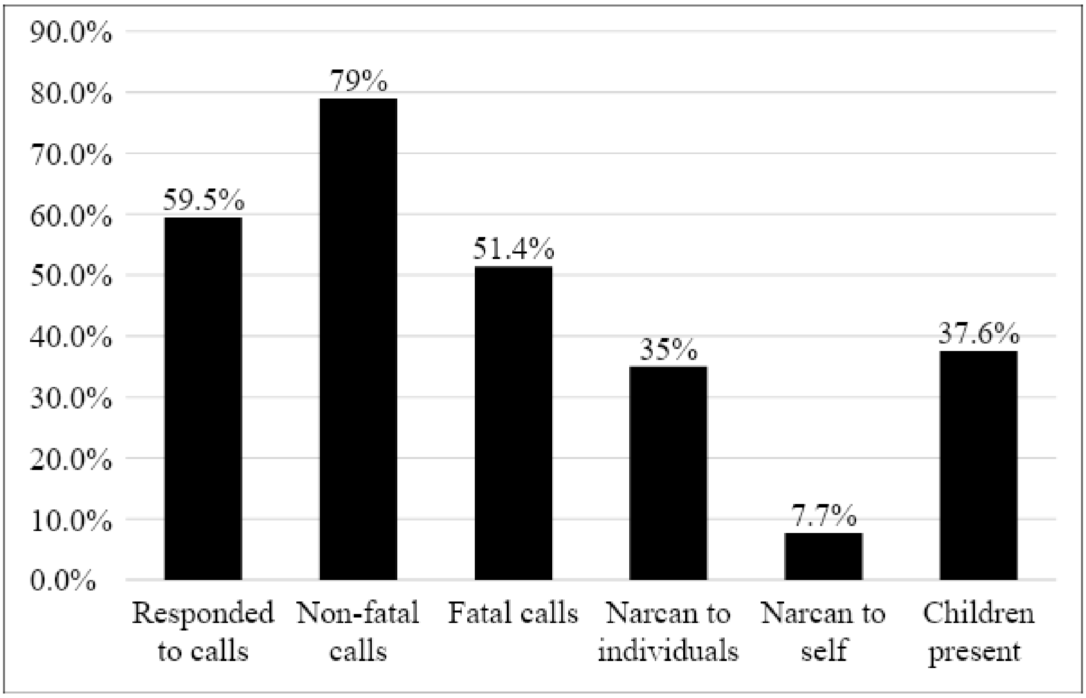
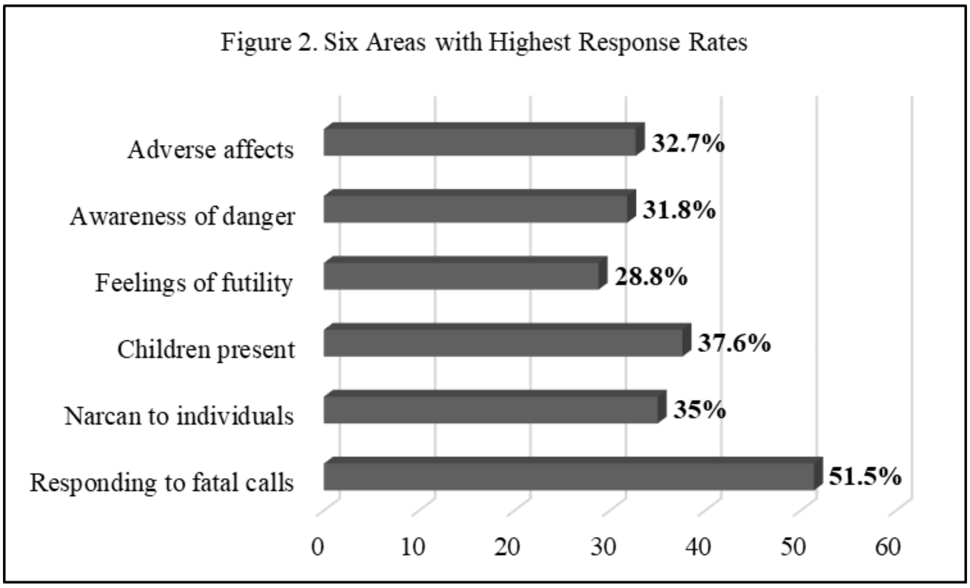


Figure 2: Six areas with the highest response rates



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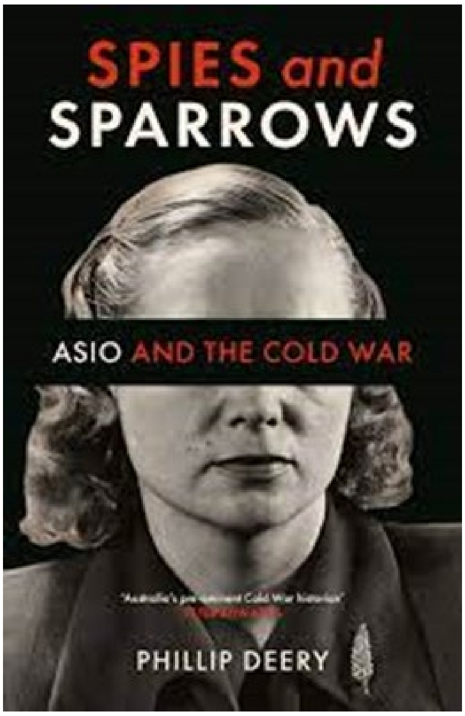
Spies and Sparrows: ASIO and the Cold War

By Phillip Deery

Melbourne University Press

2021, paperback, 270 pages

ISBN: 9780522878301



Reviewed by Samantha Jones

While the literature on intelligence agencies continues to expand, partly in response to civilians' growing awareness of the role the latter play in their lives, little is known about the effects intelligence has on the 'spies and sparrows' of the intelligence world. Phillip Deery has filled this gap by examining the lives of ordinary people who become 'extraordinary' once employed by intelligence agencies and the impact this has had on them and the people around them.

The book is captivating and brutally honest from the first sentence: *"How important is the work of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)? It's so fucking necessary it's frightening"* (p. 1). This sentence highlights a significant turning point in 1965 when Australia was continuing to develop its arm in the intelligence world due to the overreaching power of the Communist Party. Deery explains that the term 'sparrow' comes from the name of an ASIO plan to insert a sparrow in every Communist Party branch in Australia. By 1972, over 500 sparrows were employed by ASIO across 120 branches within Australia: that operation turned many ordinary Australians into 'spies and sparrows'.

Deery examines the lives of eight people within the intelligence world. These are the scientist, the grouper, the doctor, the housewife, the defector, the airman, the migrant, and the sparrow. In doing so, Deery connects the ideological influences of the Cold War to the institutionalisation of the intelligence world and outlines how these influences changed the lives of spies and sparrows and their individual and collective worlds. The historical analysis of the people in Deery's book highlights the pressure and psychological torment that afflicts the spies and sparrows of ASIO. A Monash University student who was employed by ASIO stated that *"as time went on, my conscience started to get the better of me and the dilemma of being two people trapped me"* (p. 10). A Sydney University student who was recruited *"suffered a nervous breakdown in 1976 when he could no longer cope psychologically with the conflicts of a compartmentalised life"* (p. 10). It also brought about constant fear of assassination not only for the 'spies and sparrows', but for the people they loved. The constant fear of being under threat deepened the emotional turmoil that is highlighted in each chapter. It is especially reflected in the story of Evdokia Petrov, when she points out *"I am existing now, not living"* (p. 121). Each chapter brings to light the psychological burden of the spies and sparrows of ASIO, and the damage that caused to their wellbeing and that of their loved ones.

Deery's analysis highlights the reach of intelligence agencies' surveillance, monitoring not just communists and suspected communists but also academics, scientists, journalists, the employed 'spies and sparrows', and many others who may have been perceived as potential security risks to Australia. This highlights ASIO's power at the time, as anyone could be classified as a potential threat to national security.

In this way, *Spies and Sparrows* also sheds light on ASIO's conduct during the Cold War, whereby an alleged desire to keep citizens safe often led to questionable tactics, especially concerning the blanket surveillance of Australia's citizens. These concerns about the overreach of intelligence have not subsided at present, as civil society continues to voice its worries about legislation allowing ASIO's unlimited access to the technological data-driven lives of society. In such an environment, Deery's book provides valuable insight into the activities of intelligence agencies and underscores the toll they have often taken on citizens. In this regard, *Spies and Sparrows* offers a chance to reflect on the ethical challenges surrounding intelligence work, raising familiar questions about the need to balance security, privacy, and morality.

In conclusion, Deery's book is extensively researched and provides an in-depth account of the historical underpinnings of ASIO and its role in the Cold War. This type of historical intelligence book can be used not only to understand the past but to work towards positive changes in the practices of the Australian Intelligence Community.

About the Reviewer

Samantha Jones *is a Doctorate of Public Safety student at Charles Sturt University, analysing terrorist cells on an international scale. She has a Masters of Intelligence Analysis and Bachelor of Criminology, has previously worked in intelligence, and is an Adjunct Associate Lecturer in Intelligence and Security at Charles Sturt University.*