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# 'They're much more willing to be violent': Exploring risk within the views and experiences of frontline officers

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Frontline Voices
Perspectives and Experiences from the
Frontline

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## BACKGROUND

There is a significant positive correlation between job satisfaction and job performance (Judge, 2001). Organisations which employ frontline staff benefit by creating an environment where employees can successfully prosper, have a sense of purpose and enjoy a fulfilling working life (Robertson & Cooper, 2011). If organisations succeed in this respect, they can expect dedication and optimum productivity in return.

Previous research has stated that the voices of the frontline have often been missed, ignored or dismissed (Hoggett *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, research has observed when frontline voices are discussed they are often framed negatively as forming a cultural barrier that creates resistance to change, and consequently their marginalisation is seen as unproblematic by some.



## AIMS

The research aimed to explore:

*   **motivations** and factors influencing **job satisfaction**;
*   **communication** of change;
*   **operational experiences**; and
*   **partnership working** across the different participating agencies engaged in the criminal system.

This poster provides an overview of findings relating to the theme of frontline wellbeing.

## METHOD

Semi-structured interviews were completed with 27 frontline staff - 23 police staff and 4 fire staff. Interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes in length and were digitally recorded and transcribed.



Transcripts were thematically analysed involving six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006): 'familiarisation' through reading and re-reading transcripts, 'code generation', 'theme identification', 'review' of themes and codes, 'labelling themes' and 'report writing'.

The research took place in one local authority area in England, located in the Midlands. Like many other local authorities, the relevant organisations are being reconstituted in light of the economic climate.

## FINDINGS

### EXPOSURE TO RISK

While being exposed to risk might be thought of as being a central and consistent aspect of being a frontline officer, the analysis suggests that the nature of risk on the frontline was changing, epitomised through an increase in violence:

*…people's attitudes are changing, they're much more **willing to be violent** to you than when I joined. I think there's a much **greater chance of being assaulted now**…*

For police officers, operating individually (i.e. single crewed) exposed them to a higher amount of risk which for some was deemed to be inappropriate. It was felt that the information in assessed in the control room was not accurate in determining the level of risk an officer is exposed to when taking into account the context of the emergent issue.



**HEADLINE:** The nature of risk has changed, calling for review and increased support for those working on the frontline.

### ASSUMPTION OF RISK

Alongside exposure to risk, participants described being placed into 'impossible situations' where they have to decide what the 'least worst' option is. For instance, the limited availability of ambulances resulted in officers transporting injured individuals to hospital, where in trying to do the right thing and support positive outcomes officers exposed themselves to inappropriate degrees of personal risk.

*…we had someone who's punched in the face, he fell to the floor and he started to be sick….He was lying on the floor outside this club for over an hour, at which point I was told categorically by the ambulance service **there was no ambulance to send**, so **I had to put him** into a police van and run him to hospital **ourselves**, taking two police officers off the street. The next day I found out **he'd a fractured skull**.*

**DISCUSSION:** The analysis illustrates how risk on the frontline has changed. An important aspect of this change was a decreased sense of safety and security, which was related to resource limitations (including human, financial and equipment). The nature and intensity of risk is an argument for strengthened protective equipment for officers to use when circumstantially appropriate. The frontline was passionate about delivering positive outcomes for communities and people in need, but it was apparent that some are struggling to cope with levels of pressure. Overall, the research calls for a review of how risk is defined, assessed and responded to on the frontline.

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