

The top of policing: changing times?

Research examining the impact of change (societal, political, technological and economic) on police leadership and culture within the most senior levels of policing.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Portsmouth
Principal researcher(s)	Clare Simkin clare.simkin@port.ac.uk
Police region	South East
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	February 2023
Date due for completion	January 2028

Research context

At a time of considerable societal and political flux, the complexity of the issues facing chief police officers is immense. The societal, economic, political, environmental and technological changes that confront the current generation of senior police leaders arguably requires different approaches, skills sets and behaviours from those of their predecessors. Exploring the challenges confronting current chief officers is important to better understand their approaches to leadership and the factors that have helped shape them.

This study thus aims to develop a better understanding of the leadership and culture of chief police officers in England and Wales, the contemporary factors that affect it, and the extent to which it has changed over the past two to three decades. More specifically, the study will consider the extent to which the dynamics of power and the tightness of an in-group, which is, by the very nature of police officer promotions drawn from a small cohort, are resistant or receptive to societal, political and

organisational change.

The research seeks to build upon the limited previous work done with this comparatively hard to access elite – 'the lack of literature on chief police officers reflects the enduring problems involved in studying and trying to gain access to elite-type groups' (Silvestri 2011, p.9).

Research methodology

The research is qualitative in nature, with semi-structured interviews being undertaken through an opportunistic or convenience sampling technique. With the written and informed consent of interviewees, interviews have been recorded.

Pilot interviews were conducted and transcribed in order to:

- test the questions and note any additional areas of interest that needed to be considered
- test the recording equipment, transfer of audio data and ease of secure and confidential data storage
- consider and test transcription options (AI software versus researcher transcription, versus potential use of professional transcription services)

Ethical approval having been given by the University of Portsmouth, support for the study was agreed via the Chief Police Officer Staff Association (CPOSA). In January 2023, CPOSA, on behalf of the researcher, sent out the invitations to participate in the research. Contact was made with the researcher either directly by a chief officer or by their staff officer, and interviews were arranged with 39 chief officers.

The fieldwork was completed by the end of August 2023, with the number of semi-structured interviews conducted consisting of 17 Chief Constables, 10 Deputy Chief Constables and 12 Assistant Chief Constables. These were conducted either via Teams (21) or face-to-face at the interviewee's place of work (16) or by phone (two).

The proposed analytical approach is reflective thematic analysis which requires a very detailed understanding of, and familiarity with, the language and perspectives of the interviewees (Braun and Clarke 2022). Anonymised transcripts will be analysed using Nvivo.

References

- Braun V and Clarke V. 2022. 'Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide'. Sage
- Silvestri M. 2011. 'Women in charge: Policing, gender and leadership'. Routledge.