

Exploring Experiences of Children of Police Officers and Connections to their Mental Health

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Background

Previous research highlights the significant impact police work has on the physical and emotional health of officers, as well as home life (2;3;4) Yet, little research has heard how police work may impact children of officers directly from children.

Aims

- 1.To explore the experiences of parental relationships in adult children of officers.
- 2.To explore how a parent's policing role may have influenced their child's mental health.

Method

- Design: Qualitative semi-structured 1:1 interviews.
- Participants: 12 (3 M/9 F) aged between 18-40 with one or more police officer parent(s) in the UK.
- Analysis: Constructive Grounded Theory (1)

Rules for Living

- Powerful Parent:** Parent perceived as powerful.
- Vulnerable Parent:** Parent perceived as vulnerable.
- Inherent Virtue:** Police work is a moral occupation.
- World is Unsafe:** The world can be harmful.

Parent-Child Relationship

- Trust:** Trust between parent and child.
- Love:** Experienced loved from their parents.
- Presence Following Absence:** Parent spent time with children following shifts.
- Power Shift:** Participants experienced more power during adulthood.
- Breaking Repeated Patterns:** Participants wanted to change patterns observed in their parent's relationships.

Results

Emotional Responses from Parents

- Rejection:** Emotions minimised or dismissed.
- Problem-Solving or Avoiding:** Parents focused on solving difficulties in a practical way or avoiding difficulties.
- Anger:** Parents described as angry during childhood.

The Self

- Self-Esteem:** Lack of confidence.
- Unique Position:** Participants raised in a home which valued policing while living in a social context which felt mistrust towards police service.
- Distractibility:** Difficulty focusing during school in childhood and/or difficulty focusing during the interview.

Good and Bad Splitting:
Parents viewed as entirely good or entirely bad.

Discussion

Findings suggest police work has an impact on the parental relationship between officers and their children, as well as their child's mental health. Findings also suggest splitting occurs during childhood where parents are viewed as all good or all bad by children, indicative of a lack of integration during childhood. Recommendations for the future include further mental health support to police officers as well as therapeutic interventions for families of officers. Future research would benefit from hearing from children of police officers who are from the global majority.

References

